

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 8, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Republican Leader  
H-204, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Leader McConnell, and Leader Schumer,

We write today to urge your strong consideration of further robust funding for the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in the next relief package. The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has left the nation facing unprecedented public health and economic crises that have exacerbated underlying inequities and devastated those already living on the margins. Individuals and families experiencing homelessness are particularly vulnerable to the effects of these crises. Lacking both safe, stable shelter and access to medical resources, those experiencing homelessness continue to be among the hardest hit by this pandemic.

On any given night, half a million people in the United States will face homelessness. This includes more than 50,000 families with children, who often turn to emergency shelters for housing. These congregate settings can accelerate the spread of COVID-19, particularly among a population disproportionately more likely to have underlying health conditions. These vulnerabilities put both those experiencing homelessness and our frontline healthcare and human services workers at higher risk.

Moreover, this pandemic has further exposed decades-long structural inequities such as the lack of access to affordable health care and stable housing that have resulted in substantial socioeconomic disparities in COVID-19 outcomes. According to a new report, those experiencing homelessness are twice as likely to be hospitalized, up to four times more likely to need critical care, and two to three times more likely to die as the general population from COVID-19<sup>1</sup>. These inequities have cut across racial lines as Black and brown communities have

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Culhane, Dan Treglia & Ken Steif, “Estimated Emergency and Observational/Quarantine Capacity Need for the US Homeless Population Related to COVID-19 Exposure by County; Projected Hospitalizations, Intensive Care Units and Mortality,” March 24, 2020, [https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-paper\\_clean-636pm.pdf](https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-paper_clean-636pm.pdf).

experienced a disproportionate number of infections, hospitalizations, and death due to COVID-19.<sup>2</sup>

This is as much an issue of racial justice as public health. HUD's own reporting indicates that the majority of homeless families in the U.S. are Black. While African Americans make up 13% of the population, they account for more than 40% of those experiencing homelessness.<sup>3</sup> These disparities in health and housing together make Black Americans disproportionately likely to contract coronavirus and suffer adverse consequences.

Communities across the U.S. have stepped up where this administration has chosen to stand down, and have worked to use existing funding to meet the need for emergency shelter and services. However, more support from Congress is necessary to fully fund efforts to serve and protect those without shelter. The flexibility of ESG funding allows states, localities, and nonprofits to react quickly to the needs of these vulnerable communities, including through rapid rehousing and expedited long-term rehousing, helping to lessen the density of, and reliance on, temporary shelters. These funds may also be used for sanitation efforts such as portable hand-washing stations and the purchase of hand sanitizer and personal protective equipment, so individuals can follow the health practices recommended by public health experts to halt the spread of coronavirus.

While the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act* provided an initial \$4 billion in ESG funds, significantly more funding is needed. Experts have identified that a total of \$15.5 billion in ESG program funding is necessary to meet the needs during this pandemic. Therefore we support funding for the ESG program of at least \$11.5 billion in the next stimulus package to support state, county and local efforts to protect our neighbors experiencing homelessness and the frontline providers supporting them through this public health crisis.

We ask for your strong consideration of this request, and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Joe Neguse  
Member of Congress



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Ayanna Pressley  
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress

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<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Cases in the U.S.," <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Housing and Urban Development, "The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress," January 2020, <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2019-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.

Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

Mazie Hirono  
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

Tina Smith  
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Ron Wyden  
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Barbara Lee  
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