

United States Senate

December 8, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

Thank you for your commitment to coming to agreement on a COVID-19 relief package. Across the country, communities continue to battle the twin public health and economic crises brought on by the coronavirus. Nevada has been particularly hard hit: our world class tourism industry is the economic engine of our state, and the necessary measures to limit travel and public gatherings have devastated the state's economy. Roughly 40% of the state's budget is funded by Nevada's resorts – more than \$1.8 billion annually – to support critical state and local programs. But this year, visitorship in Las Vegas was halved by COVID-19 and convention, entertainment, hospitality and travel operations froze across the country, seemingly in an instant.

It's past time for Congress to act to bring relief to struggling communities in my state and across the country. As you finalize the package of COVID-19 response measures, I urge you to include the following provisions to provide relief and security to Nevada's communities.

First, it is essential that any relief measure include additional funding to shore up our nation's health systems and public health infrastructure. Health care providers and local health departments have been on the front lines since day one. As we enter the tenth month of this pandemic, they are managing ongoing testing and vaccine preparations, all while cases spike and intensive care units (ICUs) become overwhelmed. Congress must prioritize significant investments in additional provider relief funding, including comprehensive support for long-term care facilities and nursing homes, and for employer-based clinics that care for organized workforces. More funding for mental health services, including through the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant, is necessary to aid struggling individuals and those whose underlying conditions have been exacerbated by the pandemic. As furloughs expire and unemployment remains high, we must also act to increase federal support to state Medicaid programs that provide critical safety net health coverage to millions of families across the country, and provide subsidies for COBRA continuation coverage. Public health agencies need additional resources to get testing turnaround times down, and coordinate the massive operation of distributing and administering new vaccines that will help communities get back to normal.

Congress must also address the needs of unemployed workers and families struggling to make ends meet. Workers deserve an extension of the pandemic unemployment benefits that should come efficiently without fees or bureaucratic red tape, and families – including ITIN filers –

need an additional stimulus payment to help them through the coming months. Nutrition assistance programs should be expanded to prevent kids and families from going hungry.

Nevadans also need rental and mortgage assistance: absent additional relief, between 250,000 and 400,000 Nevada households are estimated to become housing insecure come January. Such massive displacement would have disastrous effects on individuals' health and wellbeing, the state's economy, and our efforts to combat this virus.

Additionally, as communities begin to re-impose stay at home orders and capacity limits in response to climbing cases and overflowing ICUs, it is critical that Congress provide the robust supports that will enable small businesses to continue to operate safely, maintain their workforces, and emerge from the pandemic. The Save Our Stages Act and the RESTAURANTS Act will benefit Nevada's venues and restaurants, but more must be done to aid the state's largest employers in the gaming and hospitality industry and the thousands of small businesses that run on the state's tourism economy, as well as those impacted by COVID-19-related slowdowns. The STEP Act to aid organizations involved in promoting and hosting tourism, travel, or other special events, and the expanded availability of Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) as proposed under the EIDL for Small Businesses Act will be critical to sustain businesses through the pandemic, and empower them to rebuild as the threat of COVID-19 subsides. Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans should be made available to the nonprofits that have provided everything from technical assistance to businesses navigating COVID-19 resources, to advocacy on behalf of health care providers fighting for more relief. We should enable communities to leverage COVID relief investments to ease longstanding issues like broadband access in rural communities through the Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act, or improving economic diversification through renewable energy tax investments that will boost the number of stable, good-paying jobs across Nevada.

Finally, it is imperative that Congress make available additional funding directly to state, local and tribal governments of all sizes that are managing the COVID-19 response in their communities. These funds have been critical to building testing and tracing capacity, permitting the safe operation of essential business, and enabling local governments to respond to specific needs within their community. Existing funds that governments are still working to spend on continuing COVID-19 response activities should remain available to into 2021, and funds should be made flexible to enable governments to shore up critical programs that will face further cuts absent additional federal funding.

Families across the country are in dire need of additional federal support, and these policies will provide aid to those who need it most. We cannot afford to let this opportunity for a relief measure pass. I look forward to working with you to address the needs of Nevadans as Congress works toward agreement on year-end measures.

Sincerely,



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator