



AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

For science. For action. For health.

April 7, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leaders Schumer and McCarthy:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals that champions the health of all people and communities, I write to thank you for the critical support you have already provided to protect the health of the public and combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The three previous bills passed by Congress and signed by the president have provided crucial additional funding and support for our public health system, workers and the most vulnerable in our nation. Looking forward, we know much more will need to be done to protect the public from the immediate impacts of the pandemic and to ensure we are better prepared in the future.

As you work to develop additional legislation to protect the health and economic security of the nation during this public health emergency, we urge your support for additional funding and other protections, including the following:

- Provide an additional \$4.5 billion in long-term, sustained annual funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and state, local, tribal and territorial core public health infrastructure. This funding would support essential activities such as: disease surveillance, epidemiology, laboratory capacity, all-hazards preparedness and response; policy development and support; communications; community partnership development; and organizational competencies. A reliable, long-term funding stream for these activities is essential for anticipating and responding to future public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Invest in building and strengthening the public health workforce by enacting and implementing a loan repayment program for public health professionals who agree to serve two years in a local, state or tribal health department.
- Enact the PAID Leave Act (Providing Americans Insured Days of Leave Act). This comprehensive paid sick days and paid family and medical leave legislation would close

the loopholes in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act to further expand leave for workers during the COVID-19 pandemic or a future public health emergency. It would also go further by establishing national paid sick days and paid leave standards.

- Strengthen the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program by increasing the maximum benefit available to all households by 15% and increasing the minimum benefit from \$16 to \$30. We also ask that you work with the administration to delay any final or pending rules that would limit participation in the program and increase the current hardships on low-income families and children.
- Provide states with additional waiver flexibility through the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to provide meals to students and children. The waivers provided in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act have allowed states to continue serving students who rely on school lunch programs, but limitations remain that were not addressed in the legislation, such as the Area Eligibility Requirement and the requirement that children be present when parents pick up their food. Additional waiver flexibility is needed to allow states to respond to the unique hunger and nutrition needs of their communities.
- Enact an additional emergency increase of 12% to federal Medicaid matching funds to ensure states have the resources they need to provide access to essential health care services for the tens-of-millions of children, parents, people with disabilities and seniors that rely on Medicaid.
- Work with the administration to reopen the Affordable Care Act's federal health exchanges to ensure people who have lost their jobs because of the COVID-19 outbreak, or were already uninsured, have the opportunity to obtain affordable and comprehensive health coverage.
- Ensure adequate funding is provided to safety net programs that protect the most vulnerable, including the homeless and other low-income individuals, who are most at risk from both the health and economic impacts of the pandemic.

Thank you for your attention to our recommendations as you develop additional legislation to address the COVID-19 pandemic. We look forward to working with you and the administration to best protect the health of the nation during this public health emergency.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "G".

Georges C. Benjamin, MD
Executive Director