

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 9, 2021

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman, Committee on
Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Committee on
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Pallone and Chair Murray:

We write about an urgent matter that must be resolved in the COVID-19 relief legislation currently being drafted.

Our states have received significantly less funding for testing and vaccination efforts than expected based on estimates provided by the Congressional Research Service that Democratic leadership circulated with the December passage of the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act. That law directed the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to allocate funding to states, localities and territories according to the formula that applied to the fiscal year 2020 Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) awards. In its strict adherence to that bill language, HHS and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) based allocations of testing and vaccine funding solely on the population-based component of the formula, and disregarded the base award allocation method typically used for PHEP cooperative agreements. As a result, smaller and more rural states like the ones we represent received less funding than should have been the case using the traditional PHEP allocation method. Our constituents deserve equal access to critical testing and vaccines as we continue to work to stamp out COVID-19 and end this pandemic. The next COVID-19 package must ensure that allocations of these resources are fair, and in proportion to the full PHEP cooperative agreement award amounts made in FY2020.

We understand that the House of Representatives and the Senate are working swiftly to draft reconciliation legislation to address the sweeping needs that remain across the country. We respectfully ask that you consider remedies to address this funding inequity for small and rural states that has arisen from the implementation of the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act. Smaller and more rural states face unique challenges in providing accessible testing, and in the distribution and administration of vaccinations. These resources are critical to ensure the fair and equitable distribution of vaccines, to provide for the vaccination of as much of the population as possible as quickly as possible.

This issue is of paramount importance to our constituents. We are united as a nation in our efforts to end this pandemic. We can only accomplish this by ensuring that small and rural states, too, are provided the resources needed to support their populations. We stand ready to work with you to address this inequity immediately.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator



JEANNE SHAHEEN
United States Senator



SHELDON WHITEHOUSE
United States Senator



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator



MAIZE HIRONO
United States Senator



JACK REED
United States Senator

/s/

TOM CARPER
United States Senator



MARGARET WOOD HASSAN
United States Senator



CHRISTOPHER A. COONS
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BEN RAY LUJÁN
United States Senator



MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senator