

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 7, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-220, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

We write to express our utmost gratitude for Congress' continued support for our nation's community health centers (CHCs). We appreciate your response to our bicameral calls¹ to secure robust and long-term funding for CHCs as part of the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act and the CARES Act. However, as this unprecedented public health pandemic continues to wreak havoc on our nation, substantially more resources are desperately needed to address the needs of our most vulnerable communities. As negotiations continue for any upcoming stimulus package, we urge you to take immediate action and provide \$77.3 billion for community health centers as quickly as possible, including at least \$7.6 billion in emergency supplemental funding.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to devastate communities across America, most specifically people of color and low-income communities, it is imperative to our broader public health and safety goals that CHCs receive the funding they need to effectively meet the challenges before them.

Throughout this pandemic, CHCs have served as one of our nation's most critical frontline providers. Serving almost 30 million rural and urban low-income people across America, CHCs provide testing and medical care within the nation's most vulnerable and hardest hit communities. Recent race and ethnicity data published by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state and local public health departments have shown COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations, and deaths have a disproportionate effect on Black and Latinx

¹ Press Release. Reps. Pressley and Davis, Senators Sanders and Warren Lead 165 Members of Congress in Calling for Billions in Community Health Center Funding to Tackle Coronavirus Pandemic. March 20, 2020. <https://pressley.house.gov/media/press-releases/rep-pressley-and-davis-senators-sanders-and-warren-lead-165-members-congress>

communities.² In Massachusetts alone, home to more than 52 federally qualified health centers, the East Boston Neighborhood Community Health Center has provided culturally-responsive and affordable care for more than 300 COVID-19 patients, many of whom are residents in Chelsea, MA — a majority Latinx community — in what is now the largest hot spot in the state.³ The trend of disproportionate infection rates in Black and brown communities is happening in cities and states across the country, from Chicago to Baton Rouge to Queens.

Further, as the economic ramifications of this pandemic continue to grow, CHCs have become increasingly relied upon. Today, as many as 26 million people have lost their jobs and with it employer-sponsored health coverage, leaving millions of people without adequate access to health care.⁴ By the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) own admission, CHCs are being asked to step up and provide medical care for this vulnerable population. CDC Director Redfield, for example, recently described federally qualified health centers as “an important component of the national response to the COVID-19 virus” and highlighted the centers’ role in “assess[ing] whether a patient needs further [COVID-19] testing” and providing “primary health care services...at a reduced cost or free of charge.”⁵ It is unfair and unsustainable for CHCs to meet an increased demand all while operating with limited funding and resources. Nothing is more fundamental to our recovery than the strengthening of America’s public health safety net.

Robust emergency funding, in addition to the long-term five-year reauthorization of the Community Health Center Fund, will not only help our health centers meet the immediate needs of all of their patients during this pandemic but set a strong foundation for the long-term recovery that lies ahead. And, when the pandemic subsides and every single American needs COVID-19 testing, and later, vaccinations, our health centers can and will be ready. Like they have for decades, CHCs will ensure *every* community, including uninsured individuals, immigrants, low-income people, and people with disabilities, have access to the health care they need — when they need it.

We look forward to working with you to support our CHCs and provide \$77.3 billion, including at least \$7.6 billion in emergency funding, to help meet the immediate needs of today, but ensure their financial stability well after this pandemic is over.

Sincerely,



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

² Erika Edwards. African Americans 'disproportionately affected' by coronavirus, CDC report finds. NBC News, April 8, 20, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/african-americans-disproportionately-affected-coronavirus-cdc-report-finds-n1179306>

³ Andrew Ryan and Kay Lazar. Coronavirus may be hitting harder in Black and Latino communities. The Boston Globe, April 7, 2020. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/04/07/nation/coronavirus-may-be-hitting-hard-black-latino-communities/>

⁴ Lance Lambert. Real unemployment rate soars past 20%—and the U.S. has now lost 26.5 million jobs. Fortune, April 23, 2020. <https://fortune.com/2020/04/23/us-unemployment-rate-numbers-claims-this-week-total-job-losses-april-23-2020-benefits-claims/>

⁵ Letter from Dr. Robert R. Redfield, Director, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren.

Signers

Senators

Edward J. Markey
Richard J. Durbin
Richard Blumenthal
Amy Klobuchar
Kamala D. Harris
Cory A. Booker
Mazie Hirono
Tina Smith
Catherine Cortez Masto
Jacky Rosen
Tom Udall
Sheldon Whitehouse

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