

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 23, 2020

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

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

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy,

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 appropriated \$100 million to FEMA for its Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), a unique program designed by Congress to provide emergency food and shelter to hungry and homeless people, and support to local private, nonprofit, and government organizations to prevent homelessness. Congress chose EFSP as a vehicle for delivering ARRA funding because of the program's history of providing quick response to vulnerable areas and for its ability to bring immediate relief to communities where increases in job losses have created new emergency food and shelter needs. As the House of Representatives considers a third COVID-19 relief package, we, the co-chairs of the Congressional Homelessness Caucus, respectfully request that this package includes \$200 million in emergency response funding for the Emergency Food and Shelter Program to support local charitable and public agencies serving on the front lines to help people most at risk of homelessness, hunger and related privations due to this health and economic crisis.

EFSP uses measures of unemployment and poverty to allocate the funds it receives from FEMA to city and county jurisdictions around the country. To serve areas in need that do not qualify based on this formula, the National Board established the State Set-Aside program in 1987, which awards additional emergency funds to address areas of high need, including those with recent spikes in unemployment and isolated pockets of homelessness or poverty, among others.

EFSP funds can be used for a broad range of services, including: mass shelter; mass feeding; food distribution through food pantries and food banks; one-month assistance with rent; mortgage and utility payments to prevent evictions; and transition assistance from shelters to stable living conditions. EFSP's objectives are to allocate funds to the neediest areas; to ensure fast response; to foster public-private sector partnerships; to ensure local decision-making; and to maintain minimal but accountable reporting.

The program is administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in partnership with a National Board made up of leading national charitable organizations (e.g., The Jewish Federations of North America, the American Red Cross, Catholic Charities USA, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, The Salvation Army and United Way Worldwide), whose local affiliates working with state and local governments administer the program at the city and county level based on local knowledge and expertise.

According to a 2018 AARP survey, most Americans—53 percent—had no emergency savings, including a quarter of households earning more than \$150,000. Federal data similarly shows that 40 percent of US households would not be able to come up with \$400 for an emergency expense. The current economic fallout from COVID-19 could far exceed emergency expenses of \$400 as unemployment skyrockets. EFSP emergency funding will provide immediate relief to communities impacted by unemployment and poverty caused by this unprecedented global health crisis. The program will play a crucial role in helping to get our economy back on track and families back on their feet.

The hundreds of thousands of economically distressed, housing insecure and homeless Americans across the country depend on federal funding and resources to protect them during this unprecedented public health crisis. Congress must prioritize funding for the most vulnerable Americans in the third COVID-19 emergency response package by providing \$200 million for the EFSP.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical request.

Sincerely,



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress