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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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March 2, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

Thank you for your longstanding leadership in addressing public health challenges, including your work related to infectious diseases and illnesses such as the current outbreak of novel COVID-19 (Coronavirus), which the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has declared a public health emergency. As Ranking Member of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, keeping Michiganders and all Americans safe is my top priority. Families in Michigan and across the country are counting on us to provide them with the resources, information and equipment needs to protect public health and prevent a widespread outbreak in the United States.

As you develop a supplemental appropriations bill to address this emergency, I respectfully request your consideration of the following:

Expedited Resources for State, Territorial, Local and Tribal Public Health Agencies to Detect and Prevent the Spread of Coronavirus. Public health officials and medical providers who are on the frontlines of this outbreak are already incurring costs and facing shortages of equipment necessary to contain this Coronavirus. Health officials in Michigan and elsewhere cite a need for equipment to protect medical providers, for example N-95 respirators, and to enable rapid testing and treatment of patients, including funding for vaccine development. Expanding the reach of medical providers through telehealth and mobile home testing teams is also key to containing Coronavirus, as is helping the general public protect themselves by providing consistent, accurate outreach and information.

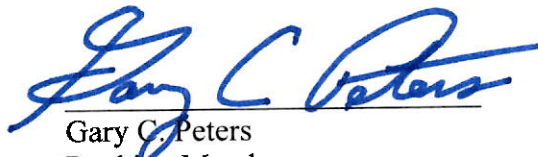
Restore Funding to Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Pandemic Prevention Programs. I ask that you replenish funds that have been recently transferred from existing programs to provide surge support to the Coronavirus response, as has been done in past emergency supplemental appropriations. It is also important for the United States to continue exercising public health leadership here and abroad, to combat and contain emerging threats that pose severe risks to human health, and this will require restoring funding to CDC pandemic prevention programs that have suffered cuts over the past several years. I ask that funding not be offset by cutting other public health programs or grants.

Acquisition of Critical Equipment and Supplies. We must prevent disruptions in our supply and distribution chains. Health officials have already raised concerns about shortages of personal protective equipment, medical and surgical equipment, antibiotics, and active pharmaceutical ingredients due to many of these items being produced overseas, especially in China, the epicenter of the outbreak. I support your efforts to address this immediate requirement. To address supply chain vulnerability in a lasting way, I request you include language to require the Secretary of Health and Human Services, with senior representatives from other appropriate Departments and agencies, to identify and examine options for ensuring our manufacturing and supply chains are maintained during public health crises -- including the option of manufacturing personal protective equipment, medical and surgical supplies, and key active pharmaceutical ingredients in the United States.

In addition to frontline health workers, I am concerned about protecting other frontline workers such as those at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), where Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Transportation Security Administration officers interact with travelers daily as part of their duties. It is important these employees are provided with sufficient personal protective equipment and training. If employees are exposed from lack of proper protection, it is not only harmful to them, but also potentially to their families, loved ones, and communities.

Looking longer term, I appreciate your efforts through the regular appropriations process to build further capacity to address the array of current and future public health threats.

Thank you for your consideration.



Gary C. Peters
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs

cc:

The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader

The Honorable Chuck Schumer, Minority Leader

The Honorable Shelley Moore-Capito, Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Jon Tester, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security