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United States Senate
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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

March 21, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate Majority Leader
317 Russel Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
United States Senate Minority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator McConnell and Senator Schumer,

As Congress continues to consider legislative actions to address the health and economic impacts of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), we must include emergency funding and provisions to address the unique needs of the more than 18 million Americans who are at risk of housing insecurity, including more than 550,000 Americans who experience homelessness each night. I respectfully request that a third COVID-19 relief package include \$15.5 billion in emergency response funding for McKinney-Vento Emergency Solutions Grants and \$10 billion for the Community Development Block Grant to help slow the spread of COVID-19 and reduce homelessness and housing insecurity.

With COVID-19 continuing its spread across the country, homeless and housing insecure Americans are at particularly great risk to contracting the virus as they have limited access to the preventive measures being recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which include handwashing, home isolation, avoiding high touch surfaces, and rapid access to health care. These homeless and housing insecure populations are also far more likely to be living in densely concentrated communities, whether they be temporary camps or shelters, which greatly increases the likelihood of outbreak among these populations. Moreover, many of these individuals have an underlying chronic health condition that can make contracting COVID-19 even more deadly.

McKinney-Vento Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) would provide critically needed funding to help local communities decrease the number of people living in homeless encampments and identify temporary locations, such as hotels, that could be used for isolation and self-quarantine. Emergency funding for ESG would ensure that shelters have additional resources and space to house greater numbers of homeless individuals and to provide access to medical care, including the provision of "street medicine" to homeless individuals reluctant to seek care in traditional health settings. Emergency relief funding would also allow for the establishment of a short-term rental assistance program similar to the Disaster Housing Assistance Program, which has been used by Congress and previous Administrations in past disasters to help get people into affordable and stable housing quickly where they can keep themselves and their neighbors safe and healthy .

Congress must also provide emergency relief funding for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). CDBG funding is critical for supporting local communities in addressing housing rehabilitation, infrastructure improvements and economic development projects across the country. Emergency CDBG funding will provide state and local governments with flexible resources to address the needs of their communities during this crisis, including by helping to support the establishment of mobile testing locations for vulnerable populations, such as homeless or housing insecure Americans, expanding meal delivery programs to individuals with mobility issues, and the purchasing of cleaning supplies. Congress should also waive the cap on CDBG spending limits in order to provide these local communities with maximum flexibility in responding to COVID-19.

The hundreds of thousands of housing insecure and homeless Americans across the country depend on federal funding and resources to protect them against this unprecedented public health crisis. Congress must prioritize funding for the most vulnerable Americans in the third COVID-19 emergency response package. Thank you for your consideration of this critical request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kirsten Gillibrand". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator