

August 4, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House

Dear President Trump:

The United States Conference of Mayors – and the more than 1,400 cities it represents – is grateful for the actions the Administration and Congress have taken over the last several months to respond to COVID-19. We are also pleased that you recognize more must be done to address the ongoing public health pandemic and spur an economic recovery.

This public health crisis continues to have devastating effects on communities across the country. As discussions advance on the next pandemic response package, and as cases continue to surge across the nation, we urge you to make support for American cities a top priority.

Today we are writing to request \$250 billion in direct, flexible emergency assistance to cities of all sizes in the COVID response and recovery bill currently under negotiation, and to convey the great urgency of need in American cities.

From the start, cities have been on the front lines of the fight against this disease, coordinating local responses and devoting significant resources to help keep people safe. At the same time, as economies shut down, cities have experienced a precipitous decline in tax revenue – the full impact of which economists expect to grow. Together, these dynamics have decimated city budgets in cities large and small.

These budget gaps are a direct result of this pandemic, and they are forcing painful decisions, including layoffs, furloughs, and cuts to essential government services when our residents need them the most. The situation is threatening public safety and costing people jobs. Data from the U.S. Department of Labor shows that close to 1.5 million Americans who work in state and local government have entered unemployment since the pandemic began.

As you continue to look for ways to support small businesses and the unemployed, we implore you not to leave cities behind. While \$150 billion was set aside for state and local governments in the CARES Act, the 500,000-resident population threshold included in the law resulted in only 38 American cities qualifying for any direct assistance. Cities that did receive that direct federal aid were not allowed to use those resources to mitigate the shortfalls in their local budgets.

To date, most American cities have received no direct assistance at all. That is why we have asked that cities of all sizes be eligible for federal aid, and that it be flexible enough to support the individual budget needs of cities. It is also important to appreciate that these budget shortfalls are not a blue state or a red state challenge. The virus knows no geographic boundaries or party affiliation, and there are budget crises in every state and in cities big and small.

All of us want to rebound from this pandemic as quickly as possible. But we cannot have a strong recovery without strong cities. We know from past crises that a failure to support cities will drag on the nation's economic growth. Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell testified to Congress earlier this year that a failure to support cities in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis created a situation in which "local government layoffs and lack of hiring did weigh on economic growth."

This is a once-in-a-lifetime crisis that requires a strong local-federal partnership. We have been proud to support the recovery on the ground in American cities and ask that you support cities as we work together to overcome the devastation caused by this ongoing pandemic.

Sincerely,

Greg Fischer
President
Mayor of Louisville, KY

Nan Whaley
Vice President
Mayor of Dayton, OH