

United States Senate

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Schumer and Senator McConnell,

As Congress contemplates sending direct payments to help mitigate the economic impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on Americans, we write urging you to accommodate persons experiencing homelessness. This at-risk population faces unique challenges in receiving healthcare and financial assistance. To care for this vulnerable population, we must take this dual challenge into account.

People experiencing homelessness are exceptionally vulnerable to the Coronavirus. Whether inside in shelters or outside in encampments, many are already in bad health and cannot self-quarantine. The virus could spread very fast among this population—which puts the general public at risk as well. Providing cash payments to all Americans will help both those experiencing homelessness and the general public, but specific obstacles must be considered to ensure those funds are fairly dispersed.

If we are to mail checks to every American, people experiencing homelessness must be able to access the funds in a safe, reliable, and equitable manner. The following must be considered:

- How will we distribute funds to those without a permanent address?
- If we expect to distribute funds at central locations such as homeless shelters, how will we ensure appropriate social distancing to maintain public health?
- How will we accommodate those who may not have reliable government issued identification?
- Considering people experiencing homelessness are not likely to have bank accounts or engage with traditional financial institutions, any check received would need to be cashed. Considering check cashing often takes a substantial percentage of the funds, how will we ensure persons experiencing homeless receive their fair share?
- How do we make sure adequate outreach is done so that people experiencing homelessness will be aware of the benefits to which they are entitled?

Additionally, legislation should make explicit that benefits should not be considered income and do not impact eligibility for means-tested public benefit programs.

As we move to support all Americans in navigating the effects of COVID-19 and fighting the public health crisis, we must truly aim to support all Americans, especially the most vulnerable. In helping people experiencing homelessness, we will promote the public health of every American.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator



MAZIE K. HIRONO
United States Senator



RON WYDEN
Member of Congress



BERNARD SANDERS
Member of Congress



RICHARD J. DURBIN
United States Senator