



December 2, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy,

On behalf of the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the 3,069 counties we represent, thank you for your bipartisan leadership throughout the year which delivered critical resources as we respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Congress considers its next COVID-19 response package, **we urge our federal partners to ensure that counties of all sizes have access to additional direct, flexible funding** to fight this pandemic, rebuild the economy and strengthen our communities. To give counties certainty as we grapple with a nationwide spike in infections, **we urge Congress to also immediately pass legislation that would extend the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) deadline.** Along with additional flexible aid, extending this deadline would provide much-needed time and flexibility to address the continuing impacts of this crisis.

In every way, counties are on the front lines of the nation's pandemic response. We provide many essential services, especially for our most vulnerable residents, and support small businesses that are the lifeblood of our communities and our economy.

Along with supporting our nation's residents and economy, as intergovernmental partners, counties will play a large role in the implementation of COVID-19 vaccination programs. A number of the elements identified as critical to the execution of vaccine deployment are county owned or operated — including emergency management agencies, local health departments, hospitals and health systems, community health centers, rural health clinics and long-term care facilities.

While the CARES Act was an important first step, the federal aid appropriated to state and local governments is simply not enough to support our intergovernmental efforts to preserve the health and safety of our residents. One of the most significant missed opportunities of the CARES Act was that it did not provide funding to offset the drastic revenue shortfalls that county governments are experiencing across the country, nor did it provide any direct relief to local governments with populations under 500,000. In fact, only five percent of the nation's counties were eligible to receive direct aid.

Further, the delay in formulating guidance around the CARES Act, and the general uncertainty that existed at the beginning of the pandemic and that continues today, makes it difficult for CRF recipients

to meet the statutory deadline of December 30. If counties are to continue to play a significant role in mitigating the spread of COVID-19, we need Congress to immediately pass legislation that would extend the CRF's current deadline.

Despite these challenges and limitations, counties across the country are investing CRF dollars in both fiscally responsible and innovative ways to keep our residents healthy and our communities safe and vibrant. With the help of CRF dollars, counties continue to support small businesses and nonprofits, securing services like broadband for residents, administering elections and a plethora of other services. These thoughtful and dynamic plans, implemented as the pandemic still rages through our communities, are being put into action all over the country. We ask that you provide additional resources to continue these investments.

For example, in Kern County, Calif., the county has funded six months of operations for an alternative care site at its fairgrounds, capable of supporting 1,000 patients. The county is also funding wraparound human services for homeless residents in addition to sheltering them.

On the other side of the country, Lee County, Fla.'s small businesses have been hit hard due to a steep decline in tourism. With the help of CRF dollars, Lee County created the Lee Cares program to support the roughly 40,000 businesses and nonprofits with 25 or fewer employees.

These are just two examples of the broad range of critical services and programs counties provide with CRF funding. County leaders have witnessed firsthand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their constituents and are well-informed on the needs arising in their local communities.

Beyond a CRF deadline extension, we need a robust coronavirus relief bill that ensures counties of all sizes have access to additional direct, flexible funding to fight this pandemic, rebuild the economy and strengthen our communities.

The flexibility of any federal aid is critical and should be viewed as a cornerstone of our intergovernmental partnership. Counties, who are on the front lines of this pandemic, know what our communities need to mitigate the virus, protect the public's health and restore our economy. Counties – both rural and urban – across the country are experiencing detrimental fiscal impacts due to COVID-19. [NACo research](#) estimates that the COVID-19 pandemic could have at least a \$202 billion budgetary impact on counties of all sizes through fiscal year 2021, including \$172 billion in lost revenue and an additional \$30 billion in COVID-19 response costs. The effect of steadily increasing infections this fall and winter will only increase that devastating nation-wide fiscal impact.

This tremendous loss of revenue and increase in costs will ultimately result in cuts to essential county services including public safety, social services, child protective services, mental health, homelessness, jail diversion, reentry and more carried out by 3.6 million county public servants.

We are sharing in this pain with businesses large and small in our communities. This month, counties, cities and businesses participated in a nationwide survey conducted by the [COVID Relief Now Coalition](#), which consists of nearly 300 major public and private sector groups, including NACo. The survey results paint a clear picture – if Congress fails to act on coronavirus relief, millions of jobs will be lost, small businesses will permanently close and vital government services will be cut.

The financial fallout from COVID-19 has also forced cuts and delays in capital investments. NACo's research finds that 66 percent of counties have cut, or delayed infrastructure maintenance and 54 percent have cut or delayed new infrastructure projects. These cuts will mitigate cash flow

shortages in the short-term but will have long-term economic impacts and disrupt critical local economic development.

As you consider further coronavirus relief, we hope that you will give us the tools we need to effectively implement containment and community mitigation strategies that will preserve the health and safety of our residents and local communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matthew Chase". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue circular highlight around the name.

Matthew Chase
Executive Director
National Association of Counties