



July 31, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, United States Senate
U.S. Capitol Building, Room S-230
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader, United States Senate
U.S. Capitol Building, Room S-224
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

We write today as the duly elected officials of the fifth-most populous County in the United States representing more than 3.3 million people to advocate for immediate, dedicated and flexible funding for all state and local governments in the next federal Economic Stabilization and Relief Package.

We have been working at the county and municipal level as partners to rebuild the economy and provide unique and non-duplicative services to protect public health and economic stability, despite experiencing historic budget shortfalls as we continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Previous federal legislation responding to COVID-19 provided important support, yet none allowed for the replacement of billions of lost revenues due to COVID-19.

Like other jurisdictions across the country, we are also experiencing a significant increase in the number of positive cases and other COVID-related challenges in our county, resulting in unprecedented demands on public health and critical safety net services at the same time that our ability to fund them is rapidly deteriorating.

With the start of the new fiscal year, the County of Orange is facing a projected budget shortfall of \$290 million, while our 34 cities' collective shortfall is \$343 million. We are exhausting reserves to protect our residents and we must make budget decisions now that will impact the services we provide. Furloughs and job cuts are on the table for many of our jurisdictions. These jobs losses will not only add to state unemployment levels but will lengthen an unsustainable economic recession.

Even worse, they will impact our most vulnerable residents who rely on critical safety net programs such as: children in Foster Care; vulnerable seniors in Adult Protective Services; individuals who are aged, blind or disabled and cannot care for themselves safely in their own homes; victims of human trafficking and child exploitation, to name a few.

Leaders in Washington have expressed support for flexible fiscal aid to states and localities of all sizes. Yet months have gone by and our communities continue to suffer. More robust and direct stimulus is needed for state and local governments to both rebuild the economy and maintain essential services.

As proposed, the HEALS Act addresses two of our concerns as it relates to flexible fiscal aid: (1) it extends the period of time during which Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) money can be used to cover expenditures from December 30, 2020 to 90 days after the last day of a government’s fiscal year 2021; and (2) it expands the allowable uses of CRF funds to include covering revenue shortfalls. We support these provisions; however additional direct fiscal relief to our agencies is needed in order to continue providing critical COVID-19 response services to our citizens.

We look forward to continuing to work with you to address our concerns while advancing passage of this critical relief package.

Sincerely,

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