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COMMITTEES
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March 19, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
H-305, The Capitol
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Leahy, and Chairman Lowey and Ranking Member Granger:

As you work on a third supplemental package aimed at addressing the economic and social impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) on our states, I wish to bring to your attention one small provision that could do a great deal of near-term good in our communities.

Communities in West Virginia are responding quickly to an evolving crisis. It is incumbent on Congress to provide flexibility for local authorities to react quickly and provide services immediately. I applaud Secretary Carson and the Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) for providing temporary guidelines in response to COVID-19. However, there are a number of statutory changes Congress could make that would allow local communities to put existing funds to quick use. One such change would be to temporarily lift the cap on public services within the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) fund. Currently, the total amount of CDBG funds obligated for public service activities must not exceed 15 percent of the annual grant allocation, meaning that communities that have already reached this threshold are unable to redirect funds – even if they are currently not being used – toward critical services in response to COVID-19. One community in my state has notified my office that if this provision were changed, they could allocate more than \$500,000 toward services such as Meals on Wheels or lunches for students impacted by school closures. There is past precedent for municipalities receiving waivers during times of natural disasters, civil unrest, and other unforeseen circumstances. Freeing up these existing funds will cause no burden to the taxpayer while greatly speeding up a community's ability to provide nutrition programs, housing solutions, and health services.

It is important to me that we give our local authorities all the tools and available resources to respond accordingly to this pandemic. The better we prepare our local communities, the better we will respond to this crisis. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

With Warmest Regards,



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator