

NACCHO

National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

May 1, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Senator Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Representative McCarthy:

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the nearly 3,000 local health departments across the country thank you for providing support to novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak response efforts.

As we face the most challenging public health test of a lifetime, local health departments are leading on the front lines of the response. Just like grocery store employees, public transportation workers, and healthcare professionals working countless hours in hospitals and primary care settings, public health professionals are essential employees whose work is critical to slowing the spread of disease and helping to reopen our communities. They do so while working extended shifts, often without access to sufficient personal protective equipment, putting themselves—and their families—at risk to protect the lives of others. As you design policies to support essential workers, local health department staff should be front of mind and eligible for this assistance, including access to extra “hazard pay” included in any future coronavirus response bill.

Public health professionals at local health departments in cities and counties across the nation are equally at risk as other workers on the front lines. Local health departments work to protect the public and ensure critical needs are met in their communities. Examples of such activities include establishing drive through testing sites, creating temporary isolation sites, and interviewing infected individuals to complete contact tracing activities. Beyond their active roles in the COVID-19 response, local health department workers continue to provide other essential services to their communities, including distributing food and essential supplies to vulnerable families through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, providing sexually-transmitted disease testing and treatment on a prioritized basis, and offering limited syringe services programs to slow the spread of infectious disease related to drug use.

In order to complete these essential and live-saving activities, local health departments need to maintain a robust workforce. Unfortunately, local health departments and governmental public health have been underfunded for years. The local and state public health workforce across the United States has been cut by nearly 25 percent since 2008. Projections suggest that nearly half of the local



and state health department workforce might leave in coming years. That means that they need to do more work with fewer people, leading to extended shifts and increased potential exposure to the virus. For example, recently at the Toledo, OH/Lucas Co. Health Department, the health department had to be closed down and outbreak response halted temporarily because so many employees had come down with COVID-19, likely contracted in the course of their daily work to serve the public. Any reduction in services provided to the public comes with a cost to people's health in this time of crisis.

In order to protect the public from COVID-19 and all other public health threats, local health departments need to be supported in their efforts. In order to sustain the public health workforce, public health professionals should be included in any hazard pay or similar effort to recognize and support frontline workers in the COVID-19 response.

NACCHO and local health departments look forward to continuing to work with Congress to address this global pandemic and shore up the public health system here at home so that Americans are protected from all public health threats. For additional information, please contact Adriane Casalotti, NACCHO's Chief of Government and Public Affairs, at acasalotti@naccho.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lori Tremmel Freeman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Lori Tremmel Freeman, MBA
CEO