

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 07, 2020

The Honorable Steven T. Mnuchin
Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Mnuchin,

We are writing to ask you to ensure that direct assistance provided by the bipartisan Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (the CARES Act) reaches people experiencing homelessness. The COVID-19 public health emergency has placed a significant financial burden on millions of Americans, and we are hopeful that the direct stimulus payments provided in the CARES Act will help cover necessary personal expenses incurred as a result of the pandemic. As you begin to disburse these payments, we urge you to consider the challenges in accessing these payments faced by individuals experiencing homelessness and those without a permanent place of residence.

Section 2201(e) of the CARES Act requires the Secretary of the Treasury, in coordination with other relevant federal agencies, to conduct a public awareness campaign on the availability of these direct payments for individuals who may not have filed tax returns in recent years. As you implement this provision, we urge you to take into account barriers to access for both sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals.

Homeless populations will be disproportionately impacted by both the negative health effects of COVID-19 and the unprecedented economic crisis that has followed. A recent report found that the density in unsheltered communities, emergency shelters, and transitional housing poses risks for rapid transmission of the virus.¹ Inadequate access to hygiene, sanitation, and health care also leave persons experiencing homelessness, many of whom are seniors or have preexisting health conditions, more vulnerable to this pandemic. Given these challenges, we must work to provide safe, stable housing to homeless individuals and make sure they have access to the basic sanitation and nutrition that they need to survive this crisis.

In addition, people experiencing homelessness face unique barriers to receiving the payments they are entitled to under the law. Many have no bank account in which they could receive a direct deposit, and no fixed address to receive a check in the mail – and if they do receive a check, fees at check cashing institutions are often exorbitantly high.

¹ Dennis Culhane, Dan Treglia, and Ken Steif, “Estimated Emergency and Observational/Quarantine Capacity Need for the US Homeless Population Related to COVID-19 Exposure by County; Projected Hospitalizations, Intensive Care Units and Mortality,” *National Alliance to End Homelessness*, (March 2020): https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-paper_clean-636pm.pdf

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People experiencing homelessness are among those most in need of the economic relief payments, but also are among the groups of individuals facing the biggest impediments to accessing those funds. We urge you to, at a minimum, take the following steps to ensure homeless Americans receive the economic assistance payments they are entitled to under the CARES Act. First, the Treasury Department should publish guidance that does not preclude those without a permanent address or bank account from receiving a rebate. Second, we urge you to publish specific procedures for those without a permanent address, government issued identification, and/or bank account about how they can access their payment. Third, as you develop a public awareness campaign, we ask that you work with local and national advocates for people experiencing homelessness to disseminate information about eligibility for these benefits, and coordinate with local Continuums of Care to identify recipients and distribute payments. Finally, we urge you to expand automatic payments to individuals who are already known to the federal government but do not file tax returns, including those individuals who receive other government benefit payments, such as Department of Veterans Affairs disability benefits, Supplemental Security Income, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, and Medicaid.

Thank you for your work on these important issues, and we look forward to your rapid implementation of this provision of the CARES Act.

Sincerely,

Senator Tina Smith
Senator Brian Schatz
Senator Jack Reed
Senator Ron Wyden
Senator Chris Van Hollen
Senator Sheldon Whitehouse
Senator Richard Blumenthal
Senator Mazie Hirono
Senator Edward J. Markey
Senator Dianne Feinstein
Senator Robert Menendez
Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
Senator Sherrod Brown
Senator Richard J. Durbin
Senator Catherine Cortez Masto
Senator Tammy Baldwin
Senator Patty Murray
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Senator Kamala D. Harris
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