

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 3, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar,

We write to request that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) swiftly begin implementing the \$100 billion Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund (PHSSEF) enacted as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to provide critical support to hospitals, health systems, and providers. Washington state experienced the first diagnosed domestic cases of 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the first death of a COVID-19 patient in the U.S. Since that time, the outbreak has spread rapidly; there are now more than 200,000 cases across the country. While Washington state providers have been fighting the outbreak for months, recent estimates by the University of Washington Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation suggest that the outbreak will not reach its peak in the state until April 19. Providers in our state need access to funds as soon as possible. In order to make the PHSSEF as effective as possible, the Department must target areas most in need, move quickly in disbursing funds, and provide clear, specific guidance to providers on how to apply.

As the first state confronted by the Coronavirus outbreak, Washington state, along with its hospitals and providers, took rapid action to stem the spread of the disease and to ensure sufficient hospital capacity to treat the surge of patients. Governor Inslee took extraordinary steps to contain and mitigate the spread of the disease, including prohibiting elective procedures beginning on March 19 and issuing a statewide stay-home order on March 23. While these measures have helped slow the spread of the disease, they have placed a substantial strain on hospitals, whose dwindling revenue streams over this lengthy time span have been swamped by the high cost of procuring ventilators and personal protective equipment, training staff, and hiring temporary staff.

First, providers will need simple, clear guidance on how to apply for this funding as quickly as possible. We request that, in implementing the application process for the PHSSEF, you work with providers and states to ensure that applying for funding does not distract from providers' top priority, treating the surge of patients coming through their doors.

Second, hospitals and providers in Washington state need to have access to these funds as soon as possible. Our providers have been coping with the effects of the outbreak since the first patient was diagnosed with COVID-19 on January 21. It appears that Washington may have

succeeded in flattening its disease curve, but this means that the outbreak is likely to continue for a longer period of time and cause sustained strain on the hospital system. The CARES Act ensured that HHS would have the flexibility to allocate funds on a rolling basis, as well as make advance payments. Consequently, we request that you ensure that providers are given access to funds as quickly as possible to help providers on the front lines of this outbreak, now.

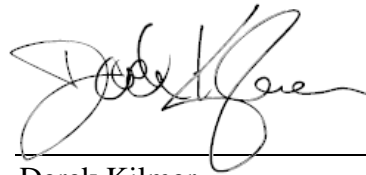
Third, we request that HHS ensure that funds are targeted to areas and providers most in need. In particular, we request that you give particular weight to (1) states with the first and greatest share of national cases and (2) providers that have lost revenue due to proactive measures they have taken to protect public health. These measures may include but are not limited to state-wide cancellation of elective procedures and other visits due to stay at home orders, paid leave for quarantined staff, increased costs of staffing from overtime, on-call and temporary staffing agreements, and uncompensated care from uninsured COVID-19 patients. These measures have been put in place in the interest of public health, but long-term reduction in revenues from delayed elective care, coupled with increased costs, has placed incredible strain on providers' finances. HHS should reward those providers that have already shouldered this financial burden and encourage others to make these difficult decisions as well. Using these measures to target funds will ensure funding is flowing to those parts of the country that need it most, including states where the severity of the disease is highest.

The Washington State Hospital Association estimates that by June, hospitals across the state will have lost \$1.8 billion as a result of the cancellation of elective procedures, social distancing measures, and additional costs due to COVID-19 treatment. Providers are on the front lines of the fight to overcome the COVID-19 outbreak, and the PHSSEF enacted by the CARES Act will provide critical support to help those providers treat patients and families. We request that you provide access to those needed funds as quickly and easily as possible and prioritize providers in areas hardest hit by the pandemic.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Adam Smith
Member of Congress



Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



Jaime Hererra Beutler
Member of Congress



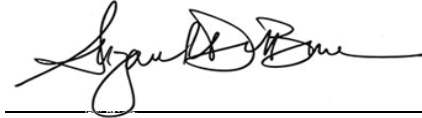
Denny Heck
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress



Suzan DelBene
Member of Congress



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress