

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 29, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

Thank you for your bipartisan work to respond to the health and economic effects of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the United States. As you prepare for the next relief package, we respectfully request at least \$8 billion in new funding for contact tracing to help states and localities recruit, hire, and train contact tracers and deploy voluntary digital tools that can integrate data to quickly alert people who have crossed paths with a newly diagnosed COVID-19 patient. Such a fund must include a small state minimum of no less than \$50 million to ensure that every state can bolster and maintain its testing and contact tracing infrastructure.

Contact tracers are a combination of disease detectives and social workers who can swiftly track down and alert people who have been exposed to a confirmed COVID-19 case and request that they quarantine and connect them to testing or treatment if needed. Contact tracers must be trained to interview patients, identify potential sources of exposure, and monitor those at risk with daily check-ins. The work is labor intensive, and much of the job can be done remotely by people working from home. Contact tracers also work within the public health system to stay in communication with individuals in quarantine and ensure that they have what they need to stay healthy, such as food, medical supplies, and access to treatment.

We were pleased to support the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act, which provided \$25 billion to increase COVID-19 testing capacity and make an initial investment in contact tracing. Now we need to build on this funding to enable states to quickly diagnose patients and get them into appropriate care, as well as help us better understand the spread of the disease, and provide a path forward towards eventually reopening the economy.

Reports by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) and researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, as well as the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) have found that 100,000 contact tracing investigators will be necessary for full recovery, at a cost of roughly \$3.7 billion, at a minimum. Other experts like former Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Thomas Frieden have said the need could be three times as much. As the initial wave of COVID-19 cases recedes, it is critical that we are better prepared for a potential second wave as social distancing and closure guidelines begin to be relaxed. Precision contact tracing can mitigate major outbreaks by identifying those most at risk and alerting them to help limit further infections. As such, additional resources are needed to create a training pipeline for a national network of well-qualified contact tracers across the country.

Further, we must encourage the use of technology to aid in this effort, without infringing on personal civil liberties. Management of public health data collected in this manner should

continue to follow established protocols, whereby state and local entities serve as the primary data collectors and stewards of this information, which should only be shared as aggregated, anonymized data with the CDC for purposes of public health surveillance, and not with law enforcement or national security agencies. We must provide sufficient resources to partner with the private sector to develop and deploy voluntary apps to improve data collection, support contact tracing, and ultimately help public health officials better control the spread of the virus. Additionally, such technology efforts should allow individuals to accurately and quickly receive alerts regarding potential exposure to COVID-19, improving rates of self-quarantine.

Thank you for your attention to this critical need as you negotiate the next COVID-19 package. The only way to safely reopen the economy and get people back to work will be with widespread testing and contact tracing, and we look forward to working with you towards that goal.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jack Reed

Jack Reed
United States Senate

/s/ Thomas R. Carper

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senate

/s/ Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown
United States Senate

/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senate

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senate

/s/ Robert Menendez

Robert Menendez
United States Senate

/s/ Michael F. Bennet

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senate

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senate

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senate

/s/ Debbie Stabenow

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senate

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senate

/s/ Gary C. Peters

Gary C. Peters
United States Senate

/s/ Cory A. Booker

Cory A. Booker
United States Senate