

Strengthening Civic Infrastructure as We Respond to COVID-19

July 13, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker, Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chairman
Committee on Rules and Administration
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar, Ranking Member
Committee on Rules and Administration
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

As organizations representative of the 1.6 million nonprofits in America, we write to ask that, as you consider new COVID-19 relief legislation this month, you remember the fundamental importance of community and civic structures that ensure all communities across America, especially those disproportionately impacted by this pandemic, can rebuild, engage, and thrive.

We are members of the Nonprofit Infrastructure Investment Advocacy Group (NIIAG), which supports policies that recognize the essential role community and civic infrastructure plays in meeting the challenges of the public health and economic crisis unleashed by COVID-19. We see three key provisions of legislation recently passed by the House of Representatives as critical to addressing the impact of COVID-19 on the ability of our citizens to vote in the midst of a health crisis; households to connect to essential online services from home; and the Census Bureau to complete a fair and accurate count of our population. We urge you to include these three provisions in the legislation you are crafting and will soon consider.

Specifically, we ask that Senate legislation include:

- **\$3.6 billion for grants to state, local, or tribal governments for contingency planning, preparation, and the resilience of elections for Federal office in November of 2020.** Voting is the constitutional right of every American. As a matter of basic safety and fairness, voters must not be confronted with a choice between their health and their civic responsibility to vote. Elected leaders from across the nation and across political parties have been supportive of efforts to ensure that states are prepared to implement robust and fair vote by mail procedures, as well as ensure that polling stations and poll workers are following critical health guidelines to protect the safety of those who choose to vote in person in November. In order to strengthen our communities and help them recover, nonprofits need all citizens to be able to raise their voice in the policy process by way of their vote, which is their fundamental right.
- **\$1.5 billion for Wi-Fi hotspots and connected devices for students, schools, homes, and library patrons; \$4 billion for emergency home connectivity needs; and \$24 million for the FCC to develop**

improved broadband coverage maps to inform future subsidy programs. There are, as you know, extensive and persistent divides in this nation between those who can easily access the internet and those who cannot. While the systemic fixes needed to permanently close the digital divide in this nation may be beyond the scope of this next COVID-19 package, these immediate investments are crucial to ensuring that households are able to access critical services. As our communities continue to social distance, reliable internet access serves as a lifeline to students and their households for learning and for connecting through nonprofits to services providing food, rental assistance, job training, spiritual growth and the arts.

- **\$400 million to boost the emergency budget for the 2020 census; \$10 million to further support current surveys; and a delay of statutory deadlines by four months for census reporting of 2020 results.** Congress has a responsibility to help ensure a fair and accurate census is conducted every ten years. Communities are incredibly dependent on the integrity of the census process as it informs the allocation of vital community resources for the following decade. Specifically, nonprofits rely on accurate census data to target our services and track our collective progress. An inaccurate count will undermine nonprofit work, and the health of our communities, for decades to come. COVID-19 relief legislation must account for unforeseen delays in the census process, ensure appropriate extensions of deadlines, and enhance necessary oversight of these changes.

We thank each of you for the work you and your House colleagues continue to do to make sure our nation emerges from this pandemic strong and ready to rebuild our communities, especially communities of color and Indigenous communities, in ways that make us better than before this crisis. Nonprofit organizations are an indispensable and trusted partner in this work. That is why we ask each of you to take an active role in ensuring that these provisions, provided for in legislation already approved by the House of Representatives, are included in your bill. Nonprofits need these tools to go about the business of rebuilding our future, and we need your help.

We trust we can count on your support.

Sincerely,

Americans for the Arts
Americans for the Arts Action Fund
Communities in Schools
Enterprise Community Partners
Independent Sector
KABOOM
Leadership Roundtable – Service, Excellence, Church Management
League of United Latin American Citizens
Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.
Living Cities
National Indian Child Welfare Association
National Recreation and Park Association
National Urban Indian Family Coalition
National Urban League
Native Ways Federation
Policy Link
Strive Together
The Henry Ford
United Philanthropy Forum
United Way Worldwide
Volunteer Match
YWCA