

National Headquarters
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www.astho.org
@ASTHO

April 3, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

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

The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) is extremely grateful for the swift passage of H.R.748: *The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act*, which will provide continued financial support for federal, state, territorial, and local health agencies in preparing for and responding to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). As the organization representing state and territorial health officials, we have a strong understanding of response gaps in the public health and healthcare systems that should be addressed in upcoming emergency supplemental bills.

Considering ongoing COVID-19 response efforts, ASTHO identified the following needs for state, local, and territorial public health agencies:

- \$4.5 billion in additional annual funding for **public health infrastructure** for the CDC and state, local, tribal, and territorial core public health programs. The funding will support essential infrastructure such as disease surveillance, epidemiology, laboratory capacity, all-hazards preparedness and response, policy development and support, communications, community partnership development, and organizational competencies.
- The **CDC 317 Immunization Program** and the **immunization information systems** are critical for a potential mass COVID-19 vaccine distribution campaign. The CDC brings a long-standing relationship with state immunization programs and stands ready to bring a mass vaccination effort to scale. Both programs support vaccine infrastructure to ensure that vaccines are secured and accessible to the public, and that electronic systems are established to monitor every COVID-19 vaccine that would be administered.
- Continued funding for **state and local public health laboratories** to restore and sustain the nation's 126 critical public health laboratories—the core labs for any public health response.
- Funding for **workforce recruitment, training, and retention efforts** through enacting and implementing a loan repayment program for public health professionals who agree to serve two years in a local, state, or tribal health department.

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These funds should last a minimum of five years to allow state, local, territorial, and tribal health departments the opportunity to replace expected state and local budget cuts and expend funds so that our already-fragile public health system is prepared for the next health crisis.

As international, federal, state, territorial, tribal, and local health agencies enter the third month of COVID-19 response, we remain focused on saving lives and protecting the health of the public. Coordination between healthcare and public health systems is a lifeline for maintaining the entire system. While supplemental funding is critical to support the current response to the COVID-19 outbreak, it should not preclude the need for Congress to provide sustained, continued, and increased investments through the annual appropriations process for HHS to expand capacity to address other existing and future public health threats.

We look forward to working with Congress to address this global outbreak. For additional information, please review the attached comprehensive document or contact Carolyn McCoy, ASTHO's senior director of government affairs, at cmccoy@astho.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M Fraser", is placed over a light gray rectangular background.

Michael Fraser, PhD, MS, CAE, FCPP
Chief Executive Officer
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials