

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0609

March 8, 2022

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

Dear Secretary Becerra:

We urge you to use the full extent of your authority to provide greater flexibility on the permissible uses of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) relief funding and to extend the Provider Relief Fund (PRF) spending and repayment deadlines.

After two years of non-stop demands on doctors, nurses, and other health workers, they are exhausted and we are seeing the number of hospital staffed beds declining, risking patient safety. In response to the resulting workforce shortages, hospitals have had to hire temporary nurses and respiratory therapists from staffing agencies, which can more than double labor costs.

Hospitals need flexibility in their PRF payment use to better offset the cost of staffing. For instance, existing salary caps are restricting some hospitals from accessing COVID-19 relief funding to cover workforce expenses. We ask that the salary cap be waived to accommodate the unanticipated workforce shortage costs due to COVID-19.

Further, providers need time and flexibility so that PRF payments can be used to cover costs due to any future COVID-19 variants. We ask that you extend the spending deadlines and reporting timelines so that PRF recipients do not face potential recoupment when they might need funds the most.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

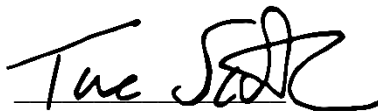
Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator