

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0609

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education &
Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
260 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education &
Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

We write to request additional funding for schools and school staff that are continuing to provide assistance during the Coronavirus outbreak.

As the novel coronavirus spreads into more American communities, school leaders, teachers, and school support staff are working to meet the urgent challenges that widespread school closures and social distancing present. From offering distance learning to converting their buildings into food distribution centers for low income families and childcare facilities for children of health care workers and emergency responders—school staff are an essential part of a multi-faceted response to the unprecedented challenges of the coronavirus.

We request that you provide funds to compensate classified hourly workers, such as cafeteria staff, school bus drivers, and janitorial staff, who are serving in various capacities as front-line responders to the coronavirus outbreak.

We need to assist those who are expanding the ways in which they carry forward the mission and vision of our public schools. Schools for instance, need additional cleaning products and personal protective equipment (PPE) such as respiratory masks. Workers need training for how to safely use new chemical cleaners and effectively wear PPE. We also need to ensure schools can continue to function as a central hub for our communities, especially those with the greatest needs, providing essential daily nutrition, developing plans for how student learning will be maintained, and disseminating information to parents and guardians on how best to support their children and families during this challenging time.

As our nation responds to the calls for social distancing to stymie the virus's spread, school support staff continue to be the backbone of our communities. Cafeteria workers prepare and serve meals daily to students and their families; school bus drivers transport meals throughout districts; custodial, maintenance, and skilled trades staff work to maintain, clean, and disinfect school buildings that continue to render services to the community. Clerical and technical staff

manage the logistical, administrative, and tech service systems of schools and are called upon to respond with solutions to the evolving needs of school administrators focused on equitable district/state-wide transitions to distance learning. Health and student service staff, as well as paraeducators and security officers, will be critical voices to the development and implementation of plans to ensure the health and safety of all students, ensuring they receive what they need to succeed academically and socially.

The health and safety of our school communities is of the greatest concern right now. The federal government must offer additional funds to comprehensively cover school staff's response to this emergency and support their efforts to promote the long-term health of our communities. These workers are an essential part of our emergency response to COVID-19 and the virus presents a grave danger to their health. We must invest in their wellbeing to ensure they remain part of our pandemic mitigation efforts and continue to sustain the health, safety, and support of our students, families, and communities.

We strongly urge you to act on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Senator Michael F. Bennet
Senator Cory A. Booker
Senator Edward J. Markey
Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
Senator Tammy Baldwin
Senator Margaret Wood Hassan
Senator Tina Smith
Senator Tim Kaine
Senator Jack Reed
Senator Robert Menendez

Senator Bernard Sanders
Senator Ron Wyden
Senator Richard Blumenthal
Senator Richard J. Durbin
Senator Jeanne Shaheen
Senator Sherrod Brown
Senator Tammy Duckworth
Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr.
Senator Amy Klobuchar

CC: Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer