

**The Honorable Mitch McConnell**

Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

**The Honorable Nancy Pelosi**

Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

**The Honorable Charles Schumer**

Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

**The Honorable Kevin McCarthy**

Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

April 12, 2020

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

As the nation continues to respond to Coronavirus, we, the undersigned rural, agricultural and professional organizations express our appreciation for the steps Congress has taken to begin mitigating the disease's overwhelming impact on America. The quick, decisive and bi-partisan work completed in the last several weeks will support millions of our fellow citizens during these unprecedented times.

As many Members of Congress understand, living in rural America in the best of times often presents a set of unique challenges for our residents including reduced economic and educational opportunities as well as limited access to health care. When stressed with the added complexities of the Coronavirus, our communities will experience significant economic disruption and unnecessary deaths. Specifically, we call on Congress and to consider the following issues when it next addresses the country's Coronavirus response:

**Rapid Transition to Mixed Technology Access for Broadband:** From its ability to support telecommuting and remote learning situations to its increasingly valuable role in making telehealth available, broadband access has never been a greater national priority. Any further COVID-19 response legislation must assure funding is sufficient to support innovative and rapid priority deployment of mixed technology broadband to unserved rural areas for telehealth and rural distance learning. Federal and state regulatory agencies must be empowered to waive regulations as necessary to expedite broadband deployment to unserved and underserved areas. With as many as 17 million rural Americans without broadband access, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown we need to prioritize the pace at which we connect the "last mile" which is now projected to take another five years. **Rural and small town America cannot wait another five years to reach this important milestone.**

**Improved Health Care Access and Funding:** Within health care there are several priorities that will immediately help rural America respond to the challenges of the Coronavirus:

- **Increase Medicare Payments:** To ease the burden on health care providers, Congress should make emergency adjustments to Medicare to target essential rural hospitals and clinics and devise a payment system to cover the concentration of high health needs in small rural towns.
- **Enhance Prescription Medication Access:** Allow for 90-day refills on critical prescription drugs to keep rural patients at home and to avoid long distance travel to pharmacies and drug stores. Establish an out-of-pocket cap on prescription drugs for seniors.
- **Protect Air Medical Services:** Air medical services' role as a critical link assuring rapid transport of patients between rural areas and Tier I and II trauma centers must be protected by eliminating any efforts to include surprise medical billing in all future Coronavirus related response legislation.

- **Address In and Out of Network Billing:** For the duration of the pandemic and a reasonable recovery period thereafter a patient seeing a physician or seeking treatment in an out-of-network hospital should not be penalized with regards to insurance coverage.

**Rural Depends on Postal:** Mail delivery is still extremely important to rural and small town Americans. To assure the United States Postal Service (USPS) has necessary funds to both provide normal daily delivery service to rural residents and to meet the increased delivery demands stemming from the pandemic, we encourage Congress to increase USPS funding as necessary to assure continued rural delivery.

We're grateful for Congress' commitment to and understanding of the unique challenges facing rural and agricultural communities across America. With attention to the topics listed above, we are confident our organizations and the people we represent will be better positioned to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic and the economic rebuilding that must begin as soon as possible.

Respectfully,

National Rural Education Association  
RetireSafe  
The National Grange