

BRIAN HIGGINS
26TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRADE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

ASSISTANT WHIP

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3226

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April 30, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol H-232
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
U.S. Capitol S-230
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol H-204
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
U.S. Capitol S-221
Washington, DC 20515

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

We are currently in the midst of a national disaster of unprecedented scope and size. As of today, April 30, 2020, there are over 1,070,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 nationwide, with 61,570 people dying from this awful disease. This is a disaster which our country should have been prepared for, but was not, to a tragic result. My community in Western New York is breaking from the fiscal pressure caused by this crisis. As this Congress continues discussions on further legislation to address the public health and the resulting economic crises, I urge you in the strongest terms to include robust and direct disaster stabilization assistance to states, counties, cities, towns, villages, schools, and other municipal entities to prevent our communities from crumbling under the weight of this calamity in future legislation that we will consider.

The urgency of this disaster stabilization assistance merits equal attention to what this Congress is providing to our nation's small businesses and assistance to individuals and families. A strong and vibrant public sector provides the foundation for how our private sector can flourish. If local governments are unable to conduct basic services due to a collapse in revenue, the entire community suffers, decreasing quality of life and increasing job losses. We are all interdependent as we confront this disease, pitting one aspect of our community against another is self-defeating, hurting our country's ability to stave off further economic peril.

As you know, Congress, under Article 1 of the United States Constitution, has a primary role in crafting a targeted and meaningful response. For example, a previous iteration of disaster stabilization assistance proposal would have provided meaningful direct relief to communities in my district:

- Counties: Erie County - \$81,458,636, Niagara County - \$18,556,338;
- Cities: Buffalo - \$142,234,684, Lackawanna - \$947,180, Niagara Falls - \$24,167,085, North Tonawanda - \$1,619,076, Tonawanda - \$788,854;
- Towns: Amherst - \$6,311,791, Cheektowaga - \$10,632,259, Grand Island - \$1,135,144, Tonawanda - \$17,230,973, West Seneca - \$2,416,193;

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- Villages: Depew - \$802,501, Kenmore - \$803,674, Williamsville - \$279,068, Sloan - \$189,457.

This proposal was not perfect, but it represented a meaningful start. It is unfortunate that this funding was removed from H.R. 266 before its consideration last week. We need to aggressively assert our constitutional legislative powers now so that our communities receive the assistance they desperately need.

The State of New York and our local governments are facing unprecedented fiscal pain. The State is facing at least a \$8 billion deficit, threatening an across the board 20-30% cut in aid to localities, which could be announced as early as next week, that could cripple the ability of local governments in my community to deliver basic services, from first responders, infrastructure maintenance, and utility services. Erie County in my district is projecting a \$140 million revenue shortfall. The City of Buffalo is reportedly facing a \$35 million deficit and is slated to run out of reserves within the week. The Buffalo Public Schools is projecting a \$90 million loss in state and local aid - thwarting its ability to reach students, including the most vulnerable. The City of Niagara Falls is facing an expected shortfall of at least \$4.3 million, potentially making them unable to meet obligations before the end of their budget year. Every day, I hear from local government and education leaders from urban, suburban, and rural areas alike pleading for disaster stabilization assistance from the federal government so they can keep the lights on until this public health crisis abates. We cannot afford to wait any longer for this Congress to act.

This is a once-in-a-century crisis that demands aggressive action to literally save our communities from ruin. Congress needs to meet this challenge boldly. A bipartisan framework proposed by the National Governors Association, for example, seeks at least \$500 billion in additional disaster stabilization assistance. Such a proposal, if disbursed directly, should be seen as a baseline of funding for states, local governments, school districts, colleges, and other municipal entities so that our communities can continue to survive. I am hopeful that we will be able to vote on such a proposal swiftly.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Failing to meet this challenge is not an option for my community - I hope you share my urgency to act.

Sincerely,



BRIAN HIGGINS
Member of Congress