

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

October 22, 2020

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

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Senate Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-221 U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

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

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

As the United States continues to weather the disastrous coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, we write to ask that Congress take action to learn from the mistakes of our nation's preparation and response and lay the groundwork to prevent and mitigate future pandemics. The current Administration's response has exposed serious flaws in the country's ability to combat large scale public health challenges. In addition to passing a robust package to address the current crisis, we must take bold and comprehensive steps now to ensure the nation is better prepared for the next pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on communities across the country and devastated the nation's economy. The United States (U.S.) leads the world with more than eight million confirmed cases and 220,000 dead, out of over one million worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Millions are out of work and struggling to make ends meet.<sup>2</sup> Despite the passage of *The Heroes Act* by the House of Representatives in May 2020 and an updated version in October 2020, the Senate has yet to pass a comprehensive COVID-19 relief bill. Congress must immediately act to provide meaningful support to the American people.

Even as Congress works to put an end to the current COVID-19 pandemic, it must also take steps, now, to prevent future pandemics from occurring. Our nation's bungled response to COVID-19 revealed significant weaknesses in the country's ability to rapidly respond to emerging global disease threats. As the U.S. confirmed its first cases, the Trump Administration

---

<sup>1</sup> Johns Hopkins University, "COVID-19 Dashboard," <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center, "Unemployment rose higher in three months of COVID-19 than it did in two years of the Great Recession," Rakesh Kochhar, June 11 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/11/unemployment-rose-higher-in-three-months-of-covid-19-than-it-did-in-two-years-of-the-great-recession/>.

failed to establish a robust testing strategy to adequately track and help contain the disease.<sup>3</sup> As the virus continued to spread—disrupting schools, workplaces, places of worship, the economy, and most other aspects of life—it became evident the country was not at all prepared for such challenges to public health. It is clear that pandemics are already rapidly accelerating: animal-to-human outbreak prevalence grew six-fold from 1980 to 2010,<sup>4</sup> and experts predict they will become even more common in the future.<sup>5</sup> It is imperative Congress take bold and comprehensive steps now to prevent and mitigate future pandemics.

**First, Congress must invest in domestic programs, systems, and supply chains that will help improve Americans’ health outcomes, combat the spread of new disease, and ramp up public health capacity during global health emergencies.** The U.S. systemically underfunds public health. In 2017, public health spending accounted for just 2.5 percent of all health spending in the U.S.<sup>6</sup> To boost our public health infrastructure, Congress must invest billions of dollars in state, local, territorial, and tribal health programs and commit to upgrading the data systems necessary to provide public health officials with the real-time, comprehensive information they need to guide public health responses. It must replenish and reform the Strategic National Stockpile so that it is prepared to handle the demand of a true national crisis, provide enhanced funding for state stockpiles, and invest in our domestic drug and device supply chains to ensure resilience and flexibility during global emergencies. It must provide more funding to the Indian Health Service and urban Indian health organizations. It must ensure the President seriously engages the advice of public health professionals by elevating the role of pandemic preparedness experts in the Executive Branch. Finally, it must invest in the support systems—such as safe, affordable housing—that are critical to boosting Americans’ health outcomes, reducing the incidence of chronic diseases and mental health disorders, and ensuring that communities can withstand the economic shocks of future pandemics.<sup>7</sup>

**Second, Congress must support global public health efforts to identify and mitigate the spread of new diseases before they become global pandemics.** Infectious diseases with the potential for global spread can emerge anywhere, with multiple recent pandemics arising on the continents of Asia and Africa.<sup>8</sup> Despite the global nature of pandemics, the Trump Administration has backed away from an international agreement between 172 other countries to

---

<sup>3</sup> Washington Post, “Trump administration pushing to block new money for testing, tracing and CDC in upcoming coronavirus relief bill,” Erica Werner and Jeff Stein, July 18, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2020/07/18/white-house-testing-budget-cdc-coronavirus/>; New York Times, “Trump Suggests Lack of Testing is No Longer a Problem,” Jonathan Martin, Maggie Haberman, and Mike Baker, March 30, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/30/us/politics/trump-governors-coronavirus-testing.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Wall Street Journal, “A Deadly Coronavirus Was Inevitable. Why Was No One Ready?” Betsy McKay and Phred Dvorak, August 13, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-deadly-coronavirus-was-inevitable-why-was-no-one-ready-for-covid-11597325213>.

<sup>5</sup> ProPublica, “How Climate Change Is Contributing to Skyrocket Rates of Infectious Disease,” Abrahm Lustgarten, May 7, 2020, <https://www.propublica.org/article/climate-infectious-diseases>.

<sup>6</sup> Trust for America’s Health, “The Impact of Chronic Underfunding of America’s Public Health System: Trends, Risks, and Recommendations, 2019,” <https://www.tfah.org/report-details/2019-funding-report/>.

<sup>7</sup> Brookings Institution, “Strategies for increasing affordable housing amid the COVID-19 economic crisis,” Ingird Ellen, Erin Graves, Katherine O’Regan, and Jenny Schuetz, June 8, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/strategies-for-increasing-affordable-housing-amid-the-covid-19-economic-crisis/>.

<sup>8</sup> US News, “Why So Many Epidemics Originate in Asia and Africa,” Suresh V. Kuchipudi, March 4, 2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2020-03-04/why-so-many-epidemics-originate-in-asia-and-africa>.

cooperatively develop vaccines and therapeutics for COVID-19,<sup>9</sup> putting Americans at risk to be last-in-line for vaccines invented elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> COVID-19 will not be stopped anywhere until it is stopped everywhere, and ensuring universal, speedy access to effective vaccines is essential. Moving forward, Congress must ensure the Administration protects the public by collaborating with the World Health Organization (WHO) and Gavi's global cooperative COVAX effort<sup>11</sup> and the Medicines Patent Pool, first supported by the Obama Administration.<sup>12</sup> Congress should also boost the U.S. government's financial commitments to international health organizations, including the WHO; increase and improve efficiency of U.S. global health investments; re-open and support federal public health offices abroad; provide financial support and training to partner countries to help improve emerging disease surveillance; and work with global partners to ensure countries across the world can adequately respond to public health emergencies like pandemics. It is imperative we develop and strengthen both health care systems and robust early warning systems that can identify, respond to, and stop diseases with pandemic potential before they spread. Congress must support reforms to U.S. global health programs to improve their effectiveness, efficiency and equity by supporting countries to strengthen health systems, which are required to defend against pandemics. Congress must also invest in robust data collection and inspections in the livestock and human medical sectors; support research and drug development; and boost antimicrobial stewardship to prevent the unnecessary use of antibiotics and combat antimicrobial resistance. Antibiotic-resistant superbugs are turning preventable diseases into incurable infections.<sup>13</sup>

**Third, Congress must create at least 250,000 permanent, high-paying public health jobs to rebuild our depleted public health workforce and ensure the rapid deployment of contact tracers and other support workers during future pandemics.** The U.S. is facing an estimated deficit of over 250,000 public health workers,<sup>14</sup> and nearly 80 percent of U.S. counties with high rates of COVID-19 do not have an infectious disease physician.<sup>15</sup> In advance of future pandemics, Congress must rebuild our public health, laboratory, and patient care workforce. These workers should execute key public health initiatives, such as contact tracing, testing

---

<sup>9</sup>Washington Post, "U.S. says it won't join WHO-linked effort to develop, distribute coronavirus vaccine," Emily Rauhala and Yasmeen Abutaleb, September 1, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/coronavirus-vaccine-trump/2020/09/01/b44b42be-e965-11ea-bf44-0d31c85838a5\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/coronavirus-vaccine-trump/2020/09/01/b44b42be-e965-11ea-bf44-0d31c85838a5_story.html); World Health Organization, "172 countries and multiple candidate vaccines engaged in COVID-19 vaccine Global Access Facility," August 24, 2020, <https://www.who.int/news/item/24-08-2020-172-countries-and-multiple-candidate-vaccines-engaged-in-covid-19-vaccine-global-access-facility>.

<sup>10</sup> Washington Post, "U.S. says it won't join WHO-linked effort to develop, distribute coronavirus vaccine," Emily Rauhala and Yasmeen Abutaleb, September 1, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/coronavirus-vaccine-trump/2020/09/01/b44b42be-e965-11ea-bf44-0d31c85838a5\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/coronavirus-vaccine-trump/2020/09/01/b44b42be-e965-11ea-bf44-0d31c85838a5_story.html).

<sup>11</sup> World Health Organization, "172 countries and multiple candidate vaccines engaged in COVID-19 vaccine Global Access Facility," August 24, 2020, <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/24-08-2020-172-countries-and-multiple-candidate-vaccines-engaged-in-covid-19-vaccine-global-access-facility>.

<sup>12</sup> The White House of President Barack Obama, "US Government First to Share Patents with Medicines Patent Pool," September 30, 2010, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2010/09/30/us-government-first-share-patents-with-medicines-patent-pool>.

<sup>13</sup> Stat News, "Antibiotic resistance: the hidden threat lurking behind Covid-19," Julie L. Gerberding, March 23, 2020, <https://www.statnews.com/2020/03/23/antibiotic-resistance-hidden-threat-lurking-behind-covid-19/>.

<sup>14</sup> Stat News, "A deficit of more than 250,000 public health workers is no way to fight Covid-19 (opinion)," Robin Taylor Wilson, Catherine L. Troisi, and Tiffany L. Gary-Webb, April 5, 2020, <https://www.statnews.com/2020/04/05/deficit-public-health-workers-no-way-to-fight-covid-19/>.

<sup>15</sup> Annals of Internal Medicine, "Where is the ID in COVID-19" Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH, Daniel P. McQuillen, MD, Sara Shahbazi, PhD, and John Do. Goodson, MD, October 6, 2020, <https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M20-2684>.

strategies, vaccine distribution, and disease surveillance, and should be prepared to deploy to support their communities with social support systems in public health emergencies. When the pandemic eases, this public health workforce should continue to work to reduce health disparities, improve health messages among their communities, and address the social determinants of health. Workers can be recruited from and serve their home communities, and they should be trained in alignment with best practices and consultation with state, territorial, tribal (including the Indian Health Service, tribal nations, tribal organizations, and urban Indian organizations), unions, community-based organizing groups, and local public health officials to ensure this workforce suits the needs of each community. Congress must ensure these workers have access to health and safety protections, can unionize, receive universal paid sick leave and family leave, and have access to health insurance and childcare services. Furthermore, Congress must take steps to mitigate the challenges—such as high rates of student loan debt and low job compensation<sup>16</sup>—that keep qualified individuals from seeking careers in public health.

**Fourth, Congress must address the systemic racism and discrimination embedded in our health care system and pass legislation ensuring that health care treatments, pandemic countermeasures, vaccines, and primary disease prevention measures are accessible for all.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the devastating impact of systemic racism and discrimination on the health of the American people. In this country, Black and Latino people are nearly three times more likely to contract COVID-19 than white Americans and nearly five times more likely to be hospitalized.<sup>17</sup> Most importantly, people of color are more likely to die from the virus.<sup>18</sup> COVID-19 has also had a disproportionate impact on American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.<sup>19</sup> The economic crisis has also caused millions to lose their health insurance,<sup>20</sup> and many others with coverage still cannot afford care.<sup>21</sup> This inequity is unconscionable, and Congress must take steps to mitigate health disparities and the socioeconomic disparities that undergird them. This includes ensuring that everyone in America has access to high-quality health care, mental health and substance use disorder treatment, and primary disease prevention measures, such as running water. It also means addressing the social determinants of health, like income inequality and unemployment, that affect millions of Americans and disproportionately impact communities of color.<sup>22</sup> Congress

---

<sup>16</sup> Stat News, “Public service loan forgiveness can help fix the shortage of primary care and rural physicians,” Marshall S. Runge, August 11, 2017, <https://www.statnews.com/2017/08/11/loan-forgiveness-primary-care-physician-shortage/>.

<sup>17</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “COVID-19 Cases, Hospitalization, and Death by Race/Ethnicity,” August 6, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/covid-data/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> CNN, “These variables affect whether you live, die, or get help during the pandemic,” August 20, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/20/us/systemic-racism-coronavirus-pandemic-trnd/index.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “CDC data show disproportionate COVID-19 impact in American Indian/Alaska Native populations,” August 19, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p0819-covid-19-impact-american-indian-alaska-native.html>.

<sup>20</sup> New York Times, “Millions Have Lost Health Insurance in Pandemic-Driven Recession,” Sheryl Gay Stolberg, July 13, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/13/us/politics/coronavirus-health-insurance-trump.html>.

<sup>21</sup> The Philadelphia Inquirer, “COVID-19 could make health care even more unaffordable for Americans, study finds,” Sarah Gantz, August 19, 2020, <https://fusion.inquirer.com/health/coronavirus/coronavirus-covid-19-health-care-insurance-affordability-20200819.html>.

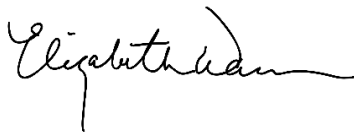
<sup>22</sup> Economic Policy Institute, “Black workers face two of the most lethal preexisting conditions for coronavirus—racism and economic inequality,” Elise Gould and Valerie Wilson, June 1, 2020, <https://www.epi.org/publication/black-workers-covid/>; Economic Policy Institute, “Latinx workers—particularly women—face devastating job losses in the COVID-19 recession,” August 20, 2020, <https://www.epi.org/publication/latinx-workers-covid/>.

should also require companies developing or producing future pandemic countermeasures, therapeutics, and vaccines with federal funding to adhere to reasonable pricing requirements. It must also rebuild the public's trust in the health care system through efforts to boost vaccine confidence among communities skeptical of public health authorities.

**Fifth, Congress must halt the environmental degradation that increases the likelihood of global pandemics.** According to the CDC, three out of four new or emerging infectious diseases in people come from animals.<sup>23</sup> Environmental devastation, including “rampant deforestation, uncontrolled expansion of agriculture, intensive farming, mining and infrastructure development, as well as the exploitation of wild species,” is a key contributor to the problem, and has created “a ‘perfect storm’” for the accelerating rise of global pandemics.<sup>24</sup> This environmental degradation has a disproportionate impact on communities of color and Indigenous communities across the globe. In the United States, studies have shown that “racial disparities in exposure to environmental pollutants are greater factors that remain even after controlling for income” and that middle-class Black Americans “are exposed to much higher levels of industrial chemicals, air pollution and poisonous heavy metals, as well as pathogens, than are profoundly poor white people” across urban and rural areas.<sup>25</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated this exposure can increase these communities' vulnerability to future pandemics. Congress must act to end wildlife trafficking, prohibit the import of commodities linked to illegal deforestation, and provide funding to protect forests around the world. Doing so is one of the biggest steps<sup>26</sup> the United States can take to prevent zoonotic transmission of disease that is one of the root causes of pandemics. These actions can also create a level playing field for companies that follow the rules. Put simply, we must take advantage of win-win opportunities like these to combat climate change, eliminate race and socioeconomic disparities, partner with Indigenous People and local communities in the U.S. and abroad to protect and restore land and water resources, and prevent dangerous practices—including deforestation—contributing to the spread of zoonotic diseases with pandemic potential.

Taking these bold steps will ensure the U.S. is better prepared for any future pandemic and can avert the devastation caused by COVID-19. We look forward to working with you to develop, introduce, and pass meaningful legislation to improve the nation's response to global pandemics and reduce the likelihood that they will occur.

Sincerely,



---

Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



---

Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress

---

<sup>23</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Zoonotic Diseases,” <https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/zoonotic-diseases.html>.

<sup>24</sup> The Guardian, “Halt destruction of nature or suffer even worse pandemics, say world's top scientists,” April 27, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/27/halt-destruction-nature-worse-pandemics-top-scientists>.

<sup>25</sup> Nature, “How environmental racism is fueling the coronavirus pandemic,” Harriet A. Washington, May 19, 2020, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01453-y>.

<sup>26</sup> Scientific American, “Stopping Deforestation Can Prevent Pandemics,” June 1, 2020, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/stopping-deforestation-can-prevent-pandemics/>.

## Senate Cosigners

Sen. Jeff Merkley  
Sen. Angus King  
Sen. Edward J. Markey  
Sen. Richard Blumenthal  
Sen. Michael F. Bennet  
Sen. Tammy Baldwin  
Sen. Cory A. Booker  
Sen. Chris Van Hollen  
Sen. Bernard Sanders  
Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand  
Sen. Ben Cardin  
Sen. Tina Smith  
Sen. Diane Feinstein  
Sen. Christopher S. Murphy  
Sen. Ron Wyden  
Sen. Sherrod Brown  
Sen. Mazie Hirono

## House Cosigners

Rep. Barbara Lee  
Rep. Max Rose  
Rep. Katie Porter  
Rep. Wm. Lacy Clay  
Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva  
Rep. Rashida Tlaib  
Rep. Andy Levin  
Rep. Lloyd Doggett  
Rep. David N. Cicilline  
Rep. Adriano Espaillat  
Rep. Steve Cohen  
Rep. Paul Tonko  
Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Rep. Jerrold Nadler  
Rep. Dwight Evans  
Rep. Mark Takano  
Rep. Mark DeSaulnier  
Rep. Earl Blumenauer  
Rep. Daniel T. Kildee  
Rep. Jim Cooper  
Rep. Pramila Jayapal  
Rep. Ayanna Pressley  
Rep. Susan Davis  
Rep. Judy Chu  
Rep. Madeleine Dean  
Rep. Grace F. Napolitano  
Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon

Rep. Mark Pocan  
Rep. Donna Shalala  
Rep. Marcy Kaptur  
Rep. Joe Courtney  
Rep. Gregory Meeks  
Rep. Joe Neguse  
Rep. Alan Lowenthal  
Rep. Grace Meng  
Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez  
Rep. Susan Wild  
Rep. Julia Brownley  
Rep. James P. McGovern  
Rep. Ted Deutch  
Rep. Peter Welch  
Rep. Joseph D. Morelle  
Rep. Mike Doyle  
Rep. Henry C. “Hank” Johnson, Jr.  
Rep. Brendan F. Boyle  
Rep. William R. Keating  
Rep. Yvette D. Clarke  
Rep. Brenda L. Lawrence  
Rep. Jamie Raskin  
Rep. Debbie Dingell  
Rep. John Larson  
Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy, III  
Rep. Darren Soto  
Rep. Juan Vargas  
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly  
Rep. Jackie Speier  
Rep. Joyce Beatty  
Rep. Jan Schakowsky  
Rep. Suzanne Bonamici  
Rep. Bennie G. Thompson  
Rep. Stephen F. Lynch  
Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney  
Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee  
Rep. Denny Heck  
Rep. André Carson  
Rep. Chellie Pingree  
Rep. Danny K. Davis  
Rep. Henry Cuellar  
Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Rep. Betty McCollum  
Rep. Deb Haaland  
Rep. Andy Kim  
Rep. Bill Foster  
Rep. Lori Trahan

Rep. Jerry McNerney  
Rep. Nanette Diaz Barragán  
Rep. Al Green  
Rep. Bobby Rush  
Rep. Tim Ryan  
Rep. Joaquin Castro  
Rep. Donald M. Payne, Jr.  
Rep. Jesús G. "Chuy" García  
Rep. Karen Bass  
Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Rep. Adam Smith  
Rep. David E. Price  
Rep. Peter A. Defazio  
Rep. Albio Sires  
Rep. Val B. Demings  
Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, II  
Rep. Mike Thompson  
Rep. Eric Swalwell  
Rep. Robin L. Kelly  
Rep. C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger  
Rep. Alma S. Adams. Ph.D  
Rep. José E. Serrano  
Rep. Seth Moulton  
Rep. Bradley S. Schneider  
Rep. Mike Quigley  
Rep. Katherine Clark  
Rep. Cedric Richmond  
Rep. J. Luis Correa  
Rep. Alcee L. Hastings  
Rep. Ruben Gallego  
Rep. Linda Sanchez  
Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
Rep. Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Rep. Jared Huffman  
Rep. Jimmy Panetta  
Rep. Derek Kilmer  
Rep. Ami Bera, M.D.  
Rep. Jahana Hayes  
Rep. Veronica Escobar  
Rep. Ted W. Lieu  
Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick  
Rep. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan  
Rep. Vicente Gonzalez  
Rep. Tom Malinowski  
Rep. Scott Peters  
Rep. Hakeem Jeffries  
Rep. Brad Sherman  
Rep. TJ Cox