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ETHICS**



Grace Meng
Congress of the United States
Sixth District, New York

March 20, 2020

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The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Office of the Speaker
H-232, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
House Majority Leader
H-107, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Hoyer:

I am grateful for your swift leadership amid the economic and emotional shock that our nation is currently facing as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The first two stimulus packages have been a welcome and much-needed response to this unprecedented public health crisis. As you craft the third relief package, I ask you to address the serious threat that looms over our most vulnerable populations, including, children, the individuals experiencing homeless, labor workforce, and low-income families.

On Housing

Approximately 23 million low-income Americans pay more than half of their income in rent. The temporary economic hardship as a result of the coronavirus can put many of these low-income individuals at increased risk of foreclosure or eviction. As a result of this crisis, homeless shelters in my home state of New York have had to close due to lack of resources, staff, and space. As such, I urge you to consider:

- Requiring the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Agriculture (USDA) to establish a moratorium on foreclosures and evictions – especially for individuals living in federally-subsidized housing, plus suspend rental and utility payments for assisted renters, and provide such assistance for non-assistance renters;
- \$13 billion in Emergency Solutions Grants, emergency rental assistance, emergency mortgage assistance, supplemental support for federal housing, and eviction prevention;
- Support for \$1 billion in FEMA emergency food and shelter grants, of which menstrual hygiene products are allowed purchasable items; and
- Significant robust funding for public housing, Section 8, and Tenant Protection Vouchers.

On Health Care Systems

As we all know, hospitals and health care systems are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 fight, and I fear the strain on these systems – especially, on our health care workers – will near a breaking point. I have heard directly from these frontline health care workers that they need immediate assistance and resources. Furthermore, the upcoming Medicaid disproportionate share hospital (DSH) cuts, which is currently delayed to May 22, 2020, to safety net hospitals will be harmful to our health systems. This is a program that provides payments to hospitals that serve low-income communities to offset their uncompensated care losses from treating high rates of Medicaid and uninsured individuals. As such, I urge you to include:

- Robust funding for the Hospital Preparedness Program, used by states to ensure appropriate levels of staffing, equipment, and financial support to prepare and respond for health emergencies;

- Robust funding for Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) cooperative agreements between Federal government and public health departments to help build and strengthen their abilities to respond to public health threats;
- Support telehealth by waiving CMS rules limiting the use of telephone visits in place of video or in person face to face visits for Medicaid services, and reimburse telephonic treatment for all mental health services including case/care management;
- Reimbursements for childcare expenses for essential workers, including healthcare workers; and
- Delay Medicaid disproportionate share hospital (DSH) cuts for two and a half years.

On Education

The health and safety of over 56 million students and over 6.4 million teachers and staff members in our nation's public schools must be a priority. I urge that significant attention be made to the technological needs of families around the country as they transition to online learning environments, and the health needs of *all* children who rely on services such as school meals, after-school programs, and other social, physical health, and mental services. As such, please consider:

- \$1 billion to ensure broadband connectivity through mobile hotspots, an initiative that is directly related to my bill, the **"Closing the Homework Gap with Mobile Hotspots" – (H.R. 5243)**, which would solve the homework gap experienced by over 12 million students in our nation;
- Provide emergency grants to students who are returning home or need to purchase food and hygiene products;
- Suspend the accrual of interest for all student loans, including federal and state loans;
- Recommend that the full-time working requirement is waived for monthly Public Student Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) payments;
- Protections and continued programmatic support for students with disabilities; and
- \$4 billion in emergency assistance funding for the National Endowment for the Arts for nonprofit arts organizations.

On Criminal Justice Reform and Interior Immigration Enforcement

We must guarantee testing for all symptomatic individuals – no matter their immigration status. But individuals who are undocumented may not come forward for fear of any immigration enforcement actions that may follow. Additionally, incarcerated populations are at high risk of becoming infected with COVID-19, given their close living quarters, and compromised sanitation and hygiene standards. As such, I request your support in:

- Including my bill **"Natural Disaster Safe Inmate Relocation Act" (H.R. 6309)**, which would require the FEMA Administrator to encourage states and localities that receive assistance under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to adopt policies regarding the safe relocation of prisoners before, during, and after major disasters and emergencies.
- Ensuring the U.S. Immigration Customs and Enforcement adheres to its policy on not performing any immigration enforcement at or around hospitals or other health facilities, which are deemed as sensitive locations per ICE;
- Suspension of immigration enforcement activities;
- Closing of immigration courts to protect Immigration Judges, Immigration Court staff, and the public until health officials can ensure a safe working environment for immigration court hearings; and
- Requiring bond redetermination hearings to be conducted telephonically.

On our Nation's Workforce:

The labor force is undeniably the backbone of our economy and of communities across our nation. However, many contracted workers do not have the same labor protections in place, including paid family

and medical leave. While some of these concerns for businesses under 500 were addressed in the already-passed response package, a subsequent package should include:

- Expanded paid family and medical leave for companies of all sizes and expanded employer-based health care to cover necessary medical costs associated COVID-19;
- Support paid family and medical leave for contracted workers, including federal contractors
- Direct and immediate cash assistance to families;
- Suspend all consumer credit payments including: mortgages, car loans, student loans, credit cards, and personal loans; and
- Suspend all negative consumer credit reporting.

On Food Security

Millions of families are already food insecure, and many more rely on hourly salaries or meals provided in schools to ensure that they are fed. A third stimulus package should build on the \$1 billion in food security funding by:

- Continuing to increase funding for SNAP, WIC, and meal delivery services for children and the elderly;
- Suspending restrictions on products and expiration dates for WIC vouchers. Items that are eligible for WIC vouchers are increasingly unavailable as families are trying to purchase groceries in advance; and
- Restricting the Administration from implementing the public charge rule change during this crisis. Formalizing a rule change that institutes work requirements for SNAP recipients cut more than 700,000 people off the program. While I believe that this rule should never be implemented, at the very least it should not be implemented during this unprecedented moment of job insecurity for many hourly workers.

On our Small Businesses

Our nation is experiencing profound changes to our daily lives and small businesses are not exempt from the effects of COVID-19. I urge you to keep main street in mind as you craft the next stimulus package. Specifically, I request that you:

- Support additional grants to small businesses, as well as zero-interest loans, and tax relief; and
- Utilize the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund to support small businesses by matching funds and limitations

On behalf of my constituents in New York's Sixth congressional district, I am grateful for your attention to these priorities. I look forward to working with you to craft legislation that bolsters the health of all American families and of our economy – so that no one gets left behind. And I sincerely hope for the safety and wellbeing of you and your families.

Sincerely,



Grace Meng
Member of Congress