

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 20, 2020

Senator Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Chuck Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

I am writing to highlight critical health care-related priorities that need to be included in the third package of coronavirus response legislation. In speaking with Granite Staters during this crisis, I have heard alarming stories from health care providers, first responders and our state's small businesses.

Hospitals, community health centers and other health care providers in my state report chaos in preparing for the impending surge of coronavirus cases. Not only do these providers not have ready access to vital diagnostic tests, equipment and supplies, but now this crisis is causing disruptions in care that are going to reduce revenues and raise serious liquidity concerns for these providers. Businesses across the state are concerned about having to lay off workers or close shop altogether. All across our economy, more support is desperately needed for health care organizations, businesses and working families.

To help address many of the health care-focused concerns that I have heard from Granite Staters, I strongly urge you to include the following priorities in the upcoming coronavirus legislation:

1. Financial Relief to Hospitals and Other Health Care Providers—Hospitals, community health centers and other providers are struggling with liquidity and cash flow. We need to provide a boost in Medicare payments for hospitals and other providers to help prevent exacerbation of near-term revenue shortfalls. We must ensure that these Medicare payment enhancements also provide relief for critical access hospitals (CAHs) that do not bill under Medicare's prospective payment systems. Suspending scheduled reductions in Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) payments would also help many hospitals, as would prohibiting implementation of the pending Medicaid Fiscal Accountability Rule that the Trump Administration recently proposed. Congress should also provide federal support for loan programs that health care providers can utilize to access bridge financing to help maintain needed cash flow during the crisis.

2. Support for Health Care Workers with Child Care and Elder Care Expenses— Congress should provide financial support to frontline health care workers who need assistance to afford child care and elder care support during this crisis. Without this support, many health care workers who are asked to work additional shifts may be unable to report to work due to lack of ability to afford child care and elder care during this crisis. School closures and senior center closures are likely to substantially exacerbate the situation. We can help health care workers stay on the frontlines where

they are needed by providing support in the form of direct payments, tax credits or expanded eligibility for existing programs.

3. Telehealth Allowances for Health Centers and Other Health Care Providers—Congress should allow for federally-qualified health centers (FQHCs), rural health clinics, mental health clinics and other health care providers to bill Medicare directly for telehealth services. The waivers provided thus far have been helpful in expanding telehealth availability amongst hospitals, physician practices and other applicable providers, but health centers, rural health clinics, mental health clinics and many other providers are still unable to bill Medicare for telehealth services. Congress should also adjust Medicare payment rules for telehealth to allow for any patient to receive telehealth services, regardless of whether they have an established relationship with the provider furnishing the telehealth services.

4. Additional Funding for Community Health Centers—Community health centers are also struggling with reduced revenues due to social distancing, and some in New Hampshire are only a few pay periods away from not having enough cash reserves to pay all employees. Congress should provide substantial additional discretionary appropriations for community health centers and should consider including a long-term extension of mandatory funding for community health centers, which is currently scheduled to expire on May 22nd.

5. Expansion of Coverage Options for Coronavirus Treatment—Congress needs to help make certain that people who are currently uninsured or are enrolled in substandard “short-term limited duration insurance plans,” or “junk plans” can have access to coverage for the cost of coronavirus treatment. The coronavirus package should establish an option for states to expand Medicaid coverage to uninsured individuals who are diagnosed with coronavirus to help cover their treatment costs, even if they are not eligible under current Medicaid eligibility standards. The bill should also provide a Special Enrollment Period for coverage in the Affordable Care Act’s (ACA’s) Health Insurance Marketplaces for those who are uninsured or are enrolled in junk plans, so that individuals can get access to comprehensive coverage during the crisis.

6. Accelerating Access to Diagnostic Testing, Protective Equipment and Supplies—I am extremely concerned about the lack of available diagnostic testing for coronavirus, as well the delays in health care providers receiving supplies they need, including personal protective equipment (PPE), like masks, and nasal swabs. The *Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act* included important investments for the acquisition of PPE and supplies, as well as development of diagnostics. We need to build on that investment through additional financial support while also ensuring that all necessary flexibilities are provided to expand access to testing and supplies.

7. Expand Health Care Grant Opportunities—Many New Hampshire health care providers and related organizations have expressed the need for more funding for grant programs, rather than tax deductions. It will be absolutely critical to boost federal funding across many Health and Human Services (HHS) programs so that New Hampshire organizations can receive an infusion of dollars needed to continue their vital operations.

These are just a few of the many priorities that are essential for the upcoming coronavirus legislation. Together we can provide the health care system and American families the support they need. I appreciate your attention to these issues.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator