



July 10, 2020

The Honorable Joe Manchin III
United States Senate
306 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Manchin:

Thank you for your letter of April 23, 2020, to Mr. Russell Vought, the Acting Director of OMB, on the importance of using local media to help disseminate accurate and timely information during the COVID-19 pandemic. I have been asked to respond on his behalf and agree with your assessment and the merit of many of your suggestions.

In fact, as the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), I can say that the President and his entire administration agree that information is the lifeblood of any public health effort. We are committed to ensuring that all Americans have the information they need to keep their families healthy during the pandemic and as our country progresses toward a safe and prosperous reopening.

I hail from East Aurora, a small village outside Buffalo, N.Y. As a former talk radio host, I understand the vital role local media outlets play in mid-sized communities like Buffalo. We agree that local media institutions—the key sources of public health information for small- and mid-sized media markets—are vital conduits for disseminating the information Americans need right now. HHS Secretary Alex Azar joins the President in recognizing that these important institutions also suffer from the virus-induced recession.

The Trump Administration has already worked closely with private-sector and nonprofit partners to get public health messages out on the airwaves. The Ad Council has provided high quality public health content for free to many partners, including local media outlets. HHS officials have also participated hundreds of appearances on local TV and radio stations to keep the public informed about COVID-19. But you are correct: We must do more.

We are building a large campaign of purchased public-service announcements to keep Americans informed as the pandemic evolves and our country safely reopens. We are focused on working with small-to-medium sized media placement companies who will buy ad space for a flat fee, not a commission. By working with local firms with unique media relationships, we can work more effectively with local media outlets.

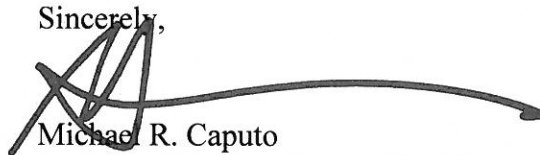
Congress, as you know, has provided HHS with significant funding we use for a variety of public health purposes for the pandemic response, such as testing, and we are exploring ways in which

states can use these funds for public health campaigns, because empowering Americans with clear, reliable information is crucial to defeating the virus.

We appreciate your attention to the value of our nation's local media institutions, HHS partners in promoting the health and well-being of all Americans for decades. We are using the resources entrusted to us by Congress and the American taxpayer in the most effective way possible to protect Americans' health. This will include partnerships with America's local media outlets.

Since arriving in April in Washington from my little village, I have become convinced that our scientists will defeat the virus and we will rebuild our economy. We appreciate the support you have provided to HHS and other federal agencies for the COVID-19 response, and we look forward to our continued partnership to defeat COVID-19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Michael R. Caputo", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael R. Caputo
Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services