

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

October 21, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

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

On behalf of the 13.4 million children in rural America facing increased challenges to their development and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, we ask that you prioritize programs for this highly vulnerable population in the next stimulus package. Many of these children are already in poverty or are at risk of poverty, and it is especially urgent to provide enhanced support for rural areas in terms of early childhood and school-age education programs, broadband, nutrition, maternal/child health, and child care.

According to a recent study from *Save the Children*, child poverty rates are much higher in rural areas than their urban and suburban counterparts. Moreover, of the bottom half of counties ranked in this study in terms of education health, teen pregnancy, and early death, 90% are in rural areas!

It is a tragic reality that a child can be far less likely to have access to economic opportunity and success based on where they grew up. In order to address these inequalities, we ask that rural children and working families are not overlooked in the next stimulus bill through the following policy and funding recommendations:

In terms of education, we should extend and provide preferences for the most under-resourced rural communities concerning academic enrichment programs such as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers and the Promise Neighborhoods Program at the Department of Education. Not only do these programs help rural children meet state and local standards in core academic subjects, they offer enrichment activities that reinforce regular academic programs, provide nutritious snacks and even meals, and offer literacy and other educational services to the families of participating children.

In addition to academic enrichment programs, we must increase rural broadband funding to ensure that these communities have adequate internet access. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently found that approximately 26.4 percent of the rural population is without broadband access compared to just one percent of urban populations. Children and families in rural communities need high-speed internet access in order to succeed academically

and meet the digital demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An increase in rural broadband funding could directly address the growing technological divide and reduce the homework gap by providing high-speed internet access to approximately 14.5 million students and families in rural communities.

We should also increase the number of rural grants for home visiting programs where at-risk families in need of skills and resources can advance their children's early education, physical, social and emotional health. Support for the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Services at the Health Resources Services Administration of HHS is especially critical at this time when the unintended consequences of COVID-19 related stress are impacting families' health and emotional wellbeing.

Increased child nutrition funding to address the need associated with the SNAP program, Women Infants and Children (WIC), and USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program would make a huge difference to children facing hunger in high-need rural communities.

Finally, we need to dedicated more funding to rebuild and re-open our child care system through the Child Care Development Block Grant program. The distress caused by COVID-19 on the child care industry has been felt most acutely in rural communities due to the lack of providers. Thank you for your consideration of these children who require much more assistance to ensure they are not left further behind as rural communities grapple with the latest hardships due to the pandemic.

With warmest regards,



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Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator

**/s/Dianne Feinstein**

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Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

**/s/Filemon Vela**

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Filemon Vela  
Member of Congress

**/s/Alex X. Mooney**

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Alex X. Mooney  
Member of Congress