

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 26, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairs Shelby and Lowey, and Ranking Members Leahy and Granger,

We are writing in strong opposition to the specifics of President Trump's emergency funding plan and request to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus. Firstly, we believe this request is simply insufficient to deal with the challenges our country faces in combatting the coronavirus. Furthermore, the manner in which the President is proposing to fund this effort, will only further harm the most vulnerable individuals and families in our community by robbing \$37 million from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Not to mention this is in addition to the President's already reckless efforts, including his most recent FY2021 budget request, to slash funding for the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Despite the President's irresponsible and inappropriate claims to the contrary, the novel coronavirus is a public health emergency. In response to concerns about the spread of coronavirus across the United States, just yesterday, Dr. Nancy Messonnier, Director of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases said, "It's not so much a question of if this will happen anymore, but rather more a question of exactly when this will happen and how many people in this country will have severe illness." On the same day, the CDC's own social media outreach warned U.S. businesses, communities, healthcare institutions, and schools to begin preparing for a coronavirus outbreak.

To be clear, the President's Fiscal Year 2021 budget request provisions including a \$3 billion cut to the NIH, nearly 10 percent cut to the entire Health and Human Services budget, and a 16 percent cut to the CDC should be completely disregarded. As you craft FY2021 appropriations legislation, we urge full support for these agencies.

However, in the immediate future, as you consider supplemental appropriations legislation, we ask your consideration of several issues. First, the President's emergency funding plan and request diverts critical funding, more than half a billion dollars, from Ebola prevention and treatment. This should be a nonstarter and completely disregarded.

Second, we cannot adequately convey how opposed we are to the proposed diversion of \$37 million from the LIHEAP program. While this Administration has repeatedly sought to eliminate the program altogether, LIHEAP provides critical assistance to families to heat or cool their homes during times of extreme weather. According to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, the organization of state LIHEAP program directors, this heist of funding could eliminate assistance for nearly 750,000 families this year, in the middle of winter and with an entire summer ahead.

LIHEAP is already underfunded and only supports roughly 20 percent of those families eligible for assistance. The program supports families with young children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities. Home heating/cooling is directly tied to the health and safety of these families. Leaving them in extreme cold or heat will only exacerbate critical health problems families may already be facing, or force families to choose between paying their energy bill or other priorities like putting food on the table. Leaving another 750,000 families without assistance is unconscionable and indefensible. We cannot solve one health crisis by creating another.

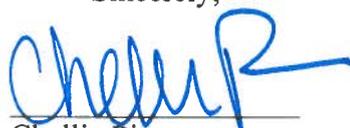
While Congress cannot prevent this transfer of funds, Congress can reimburse these accounts through supplemental appropriations legislation. We urge your careful consideration of the impact of the President's plan and proposal, and ask your support for restoring funding to those accounts robbed by the President.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We stand ready to work with you.

Sincerely,



Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Peter Welch
Member of Congress