

2163 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-2605
DISTRICT OFFICES:
2930 WETMORE AVENUE, SUITE 9F
EVERETT, WA 98201
(425) 252-3188
119 N. COMMERCIAL STREET, SUITE 275
BELLINGHAM, WA 98225
(360) 733-4600
E-Mail: Rick.Larsen@mail.house.gov
<http://larsen.house.gov>

RICK LARSEN
2ND DISTRICT, WASHINGTON
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4702

COMMITTEES:
TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE
CHAIR, SUBCOMMITTEE
ON AVIATION
ARMED SERVICES

February 5, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

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

As the nation continues to confront the public health crisis and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans need more relief. In my conversations with constituents, I hear about loss, economic anxiety and profound challenges. These stories inform my priorities for comprehensive COVID-19 relief:

Health Care

An organized, effective public health response to COVID-19 is essential to Americans' health and the nation's economic recovery. To support this strong public health response, the relief bill must include:

Funding for vaccine distribution

In December, Congress appropriated \$8.75 billion to distribute COVID-19 vaccines. But distribution must be accelerated, particularly with more-infectious COVID-19 variants spreading. Fortunately, the local capacity exists; Snohomish County has stood up four mass vaccination sites with the ability to vaccinate 50,000 people each week. However, sites across the Second District had to cancel appointments due to a lack of vaccine doses. To the extent lack of funding is the cause of delays in vaccine distribution, the next COVID-19 package should include necessary funding to accelerate vaccination.

In addition, as a global leader in diplomacy and health care, the United States must provide logistical and financial support for other nations' vaccination campaigns. Because this pandemic is global, doing so will protect Americans and potentially prevent the emergence of new

COVID-19 strains. U.S. leadership will also bolster recovery of the global economy and generate invaluable goodwill.

Mental health support

The pandemic has caused unprecedented strain on Americans' mental health. The long-term impact of a year of economic uncertainty, social distancing and worrying about the health and well-being of loved ones has been a constant theme in my conversations with constituents. Staff at Boys & Girls Clubs of Snohomish County told me they could use ten times the number of mental health professionals they have on staff. Leaders at the Mukilteo School District described the need for social workers and counselors in each school to help students learn effectively. Congress should provide additional funding for mental and behavioral health services.

In addition to these health care priorities, funding for rapid testing, therapeutics, genomic sequencing and personal protective equipment (PPE) will help protect Americans from COVID-19 and accelerate economic recovery.

Federal Unemployment Assistance

The *CARES Act* provided increases in federal unemployment benefits and eligibility and served as a lifeline for millions of out-of-work Americans. More generous and more accessible unemployment benefits helped keep Americans out of poverty and stimulate the economy during the worst economic crisis in nearly a century; Congress cannot allow these benefits to expire. Under current law, the \$300 increase is scheduled to expire on March 14. Extending supplemental unemployment benefits and expanded eligibility and tying them to labor market conditions must be a priority in COVID-19 relief legislation.

Child Care

I recently held a series of roundtables with child care providers across my district in which I heard firsthand about the challenges they face. Safe, high-quality child care is essential for working families, and Congress should ensure COVID-19 relief includes:

Additional funding for Child Care Development Block Grants

Washington state has a serious shortage of child care, which has been exacerbated by COVID-19. Since the pandemic began, child care capacity in each county in the Second District has decreased significantly—by more than 20 percent in Island, Skagit and Snohomish counties and nearly 50 percent in Whatcom and San Juan counties. Nationwide, there were 2.1 million fewer women in the workforce in December 2020 than in February 2020, according to a report from the National Women's Law Center. Lack of child care is a contributing factor. Without increased and specific funding for child care providers of all sizes, the damage could be permanent, harming families and the overall economy. The flexible Child Care Development Block Grants have helped providers keep doors open, account for increased costs and manage the decrease in enrollment caused by COVID-19.

Funding for Head Start

During my child care roundtables, providers discussed the importance of adequately funding Head Start to continue to give low income families quality child care and development opportunities in a safe and healthy environment. Head Start child care providers, such as

Skagit/Islands Head Start, used the increase in funding to purchase necessary PPE, cleaning supplies and other materials needed to safely reopen and operate.

Aviation/Aerospace

From March 1, 2020, through the end of the year, air travel in the United States declined by more than 70 percent. This reduction in travel has had a devastating impact on the U.S. aviation and aerospace industries. To protect workers and promote a strong economic recovery, the next COVID-19 relief legislation should prioritize:

Manufacturing jobs

In the Pacific Northwest, the highly skilled aviation manufacturing and maintenance workforce drives the economy and helps the U.S. remain competitive abroad. However, the pandemic has caused an estimated 100,000 aerospace manufacturing workers nationwide to lose their jobs, and 220,000 additional jobs are at risk of furlough. My bipartisan bill, the *Aviation Manufacturing Jobs Protection Act of 2021*, will prevent aerospace supply chain furloughs and rehire employees who were furloughed due to the pandemic. The bill includes critical oversight provisions to restore American jobs, boost labor protections and prevent use of relief funding for stock buybacks or dividend payments.

Aviation preparedness

Keeping the flying public safe from COVID-19 is even more difficult because of a lack of coordinated federal leadership under the previous administration. My legislation, the *National Aviation Preparedness Plan Act*, would bring federal agencies, frontline aviation workers and other key stakeholders to the table to develop a clear, comprehensive plan to keep aviation workers and travelers safe and restore confidence in air travel.

Airports and airport concessionaires

The nation's airports are essential to economic growth and the success of U.S. transportation. The decline in air travel has hit airport concessionaires particularly hard, including many minority and women-owned small businesses. Congress must provide robust funding in any upcoming COVID-19 relief package to help keep U.S. airports and airport concessionaires operational.

Economic Impact Payments

Across my district, families are struggling financially. The latest Economic Impact Payments helped more than 3.6 million Washingtonians handle some expenses, but a more substantial payment is necessary to help many families bridge the financial gap. I voted for \$2,000 payments last year and continue to support direct payments to help Americans immediately. These payments will be more effective and more equitable if Congress ensures adult dependents and dual status families are eligible for the next round.

Hunger

With millions of Americans out of work, hunger is a crisis for American families. In December, nearly 14 million Americans reported that children in their household were not getting enough to eat because the family could not afford food. According to Food Lifeline, the need for food in

Washington state has nearly doubled since the pandemic began. To address this crisis, Congress must:

Continue current SNAP improvements

Congress made temporary changes to SNAP that are a lifeline for the most vulnerable Americans. To protect families from hunger, Congress should make permanent the 15 percent increase in SNAP benefits, continue to allow SNAP benefits to be used for online grocery and prepared foods, and maintain the broader eligibility in which college students who qualify for work study are automatically included.

Protect seniors

During the pandemic, reliance on Meals on Wheels deliveries has increased significantly across my district. Demand increased by 35 percent in Whatcom County, 95 percent in Island County, and 268 percent in San Juan County. To combat hunger and protect seniors from COVID-19, the relief package should include additional funding and extension of home-delivery waivers to help senior services agencies provide home-delivery meals.

Make Farmers to Families Food Box program permanent

The Farmers to Families Food Box program connected producers without reliable market access with food banks to serve needy families. Unfortunately, USDA has shrunk the program and my district is now without a contracted distributor. With food banks like Helping Hands Food Bank in Sedro-Woolley, WA continuing to serve record numbers of families, Congress should permanently authorize the Farmers to Families Food Box program.

Housing

The economic harm caused by COVID-19 has exacerbated longstanding housing issues, creating a crisis for many Washington families. The nationwide numbers are stark: more than 15 million Americans are behind on their rent, including more than a third of Black renters. Congress must provide housing assistance in the next COVID-19 relief package and I urge Congressional leadership to work with affordable housing advocates on additional needs:

Emergency rental assistance

In a typical year, the Volunteers of America Western Washington Dispute Resolution Center in Everett, WA sees about 350 cases related to requests for emergency financial assistance for housing. In the nine months between March and the end of November 2020, the center handled 5,400—more than 15 times the typical number. Eviction and foreclosure moratoria stave off homelessness but will leave renters with a hefty bill when they are lifted. It is imperative that the next COVID-19 package include at least \$30 billion in emergency rental assistance to keep people in their homes.

Resources for people experiencing homelessness

Safe places for people experiencing homelessness were insufficient prior to the pandemic, but shelter space is now even more restricted due to COVID-19 capacity limits. Rental assistance will not help people who were unhoused to begin with. Whidbey Homeless Coalition and Island County used CARES funds to purchase beds and necessary supplies for the overnight shelter

they currently operate. Congress must provide additional funding for organizations serving people experiencing homelessness in the next relief package.

Extend current protections

Congress must also renew protections from previous legislation when necessary. This includes the eviction and foreclosure moratoria, which have prevented families from becoming homeless. Administrative forbearance for homeowners with federally backed mortgages must also continue, along with financial relief when these protections are eventually lifted.

State, Local, Tribal and Territorial Governments and Essential Workers

Units of government across the country are facing a fiscal crisis from unexpected costs and plunging revenues. More than 1.4 million state and local government workers have lost jobs since the start of the pandemic. Without flexible assistance for state, local, tribal and territorial governments, even more teachers, first responders and other essential government workers could lose their jobs. The next bill must include:

Direct payments to governments

Direct payments to units of government will prevent job losses. Furthermore, providing flexibility to use federal funds for revenue replacement will ensure this aid is used most effectively. The Town of Coupeville, in my district, offers a great example of the importance of flexibility. Coupeville's economy is reliant on tourism, so the reduction in sales and lodging tax revenue would have significantly impacted the town's budget if not for emergency reserves. As the pandemic continues, allowing local jurisdictions to use federal funds for revenue replacement is critical to preventing furloughs and ensuring communities can continue to provide essential services.

Set aside for border communities

Border communities continue to suffer severe revenue losses from the closure of the U.S.-Canada border. In 2018, Canadians comprised over 40 percent of Whatcom County's retail sales in general merchandise and clothing purchases, 73 percent of Blaine's fuel tax revenue and 60 percent of Sumas's fuel tax revenue. Without certainty on when borders will open, these communities will require additional funding to recover from the pandemic.

Education

As school districts continue to assess in-person, online or hybrid education, Congress should help students, teachers and staff meet urgent needs such as cleaning, acquiring PPE and closing the digital divide:

PPE & cleaning

In recent meetings with school superintendents in my district, most emphasized the need to get kids back to school. Until vaccines are widely available, schools must take precautions to keep students, faculty and staff safe. The cost of necessary PPE, sanitization equipment, and updated HVAC systems is more than most school districts will be able to bear. Bringing kids back to school safely is necessary for students' academic and social development and is essential to the functioning of a healthy economy.

Closing the digital divide

Reliance on remote learning revealed longstanding inequities in access to high-speed internet. Arlington School District staff, for example, estimated 20 percent of students lacked adequate internet access for distance learning at the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year. Congress must appropriate federal funds to provide students with appropriate technology and internet access, as well train teachers on how best to use that technology.

In December, Congress provided \$82 billion for schools and \$7 billion to help families access the internet. Congress must work with educators and families to determine the scope of additional aid necessary to support students and schools.

Congress must apply lessons learned from the past year to provide comprehensive assistance to vulnerable populations. Even as some sectors are recovering more rapidly and markets have rebounded, millions of Americans are being left behind as COVID-19 exacerbates existing societal inequity. The American people are sacrificing greatly to combat the pandemic. Congress must provide support sufficient to the scope of the need, structured equitably and targeted to the nation's most urgent challenges. I look forward to continuing to work with you on this task.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rick Larsen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rick" and last name "Larsen" clearly legible.

Rick Larsen
Member of Congress
Washington State, 2nd District

CC:

Chair David Scott and Ranking Member G.T. Thompson, House Committee on Agriculture
Chair Bobby Scott and Ranking Member Virginia Foxx, House Committee on Education and Labor

Chair Frank Pallone and Ranking Member Cathy McMorris Rodgers, House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Chair Maxine Waters and Ranking Member Patrick McHenry, House Committee on Financial Services

Chair Gregory Meeks and Ranking Member Michael McCaul, House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Chair Peter A. DeFazio and Ranking Member Sam Graves, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Chair Richard E. Neal and Ranking Member Kevin Brady, House Committee on Ways and Means