

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

As you work with Senate leadership and the President's Administration on an economic relief package to address the effects of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), we write to lay out actions we believe Congress should take to best respond to the needs of American families, workers, and businesses impacted by the health and economic crisis facing our nation. These recommendations are informed by feedback we have sought from our constituents: individuals, small business owners, and community leaders across Maine.

The economic consequences of COVID-19 are already profound, but we should not expect markets to stabilize until we can first contain, control, and treat the spread of this virus. We must, therefore, remain focused on providing funds to public health efforts to screen—and, as appropriate, test and treat—people who exhibit COVID-19 symptoms. Supplies of COVID-19 test kits and reagents for tests remain below levels that will be needed to keep up with demand in the coming weeks and months. We must also look to accelerate the production and distribution of the personal protective equipment (PPE) necessary for healthcare professionals to protect themselves as they work to care for those infected by this virus.

As social distancing and the direct impacts of COVID-19 cases disrupt the livelihoods of people who operate and work at small businesses and nonprofits we must act quickly to preserve jobs and critical community services. We are observing thousands of layoffs as well as severe financial hardship for self-employed fishermen, farmers, and business owners across the state.

Low-income and middle-class Americans will face the greatest economic hardship from this crisis. Immediate, direct cash payments from the federal government to these households must be a feature of any emergency action taken by Congress. Hard-working Americans have lost or will soon see their incomes shrink or disappear and this assistance may be their only option to make rent, pay mortgages, and stay ahead of their bills.

It is also critical for Congress to recognize that a one-time infusion of cash will not be adequate to sustain Americans who may be looking at several months of economic hardship. We must protect their incomes by protecting their jobs. That is why we strongly encourage you to provide immediate zero interest, zero fee loans to small businesses and organizations impacted by COVID-19 with 10-year terms and repayment deferred for the first year, per the House Small Business Committee proposal, and with complete loan forgiveness for entities that use these loans to maintain payroll—following the model outlined in the Senate proposal—as America works to respond to and recover from this pandemic. You should also adopt the House Small Business Committee’s streamlining and deferment proposals for existing SBA loan programs and increase funding for SBA resource partners. In order to prevent a prolonged recession or even depression Congress must act quickly and strongly to stem the loss of jobs and income that is occurring all over the country. A short-term infusion of cash will not be effective in boosting our economy if there are no jobs to return to on the other side of this public health emergency.

Lastly, as you consider efforts to shore up major industries, we believe this action should be taken only if doing so is necessary to prevent negative spill over to the rest of the economy, if other more effective options are unavailable, and so long as strict guardrails can be included to ensure corporations use these federal funds to benefit workers rather than shareholders. Large corporations have greater access to capital and assets to sell or use as collateral. A taxpayer bailout should not rescue shareholders who benefited greatly from stock buybacks and other benefits from recent tax breaks enacted by Congress. Congress should instead focus on businesses that cannot survive this crisis or recover from it alone.

We are grateful for your continued leadership as the country navigates this challenging time. We stand ready to work with you to ensure that Congress does its part to help the individuals, families, and businesses that are most in need of support at this difficult time.

Sincerely,



Jared F. Golden
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress