

United States Senate

May 11, 2020

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

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

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Chairman Shelby, and Vice Chairman Leahy:

As Congress continues its work to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, we write to request that any subsequent legislation include funding for law enforcement and first responder mental health programs.

First responders have uniquely stressful occupations. They are the first to arrive at horrific scenes knowing that on any given day, they may be called upon to put their lives on the line. The trauma they face on the job can have serious consequences for their mental health, thereby increasing the likelihood of experiencing depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and even suicide.

The concerning reality is that the current spread of the coronavirus, known as COVID-19, will exacerbate the stressors first responders already experience. The possible on-the-job exposure, reduced staff capacity, and unprecedented high work volume have resulted in long hours under particularly hazardous situations. Public safety officers across the country have described harrowing stories of responding to the pandemic, some referring to it as the most devastating work they have ever done and likening the environment to triage on a battlefield.¹ Departments across the country have personnel who have tested positive for COVID-19, and some are mourning the loss of officers who have succumb to the virus.² It is crucial that we recognize the sacrifices of our first responders and acknowledge the psychological toll of protecting Americans during this time.

Future legislative measures to address the coronavirus pandemic must include additional funding for first responder mental health support. This includes additional funding for programs like the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act (LEMHWA) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Suicide Prevention Resource Center. These

¹ Silva, Daniella. "NYC first responders describe 'devastating' coronavirus cases as cardiac arrest calls surge," *NBC News* (April 9, 2020). Available at, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/nyc-first-responders-describe-devastating-coronavirus-cases-cardiac-arrest-calls-n1179376>.

² Berman, Mark. "Police in several cities test positive for coronavirus, stirring fears of spread among first responders" *The Washington Post* (March 28, 2020). Available at, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/police-in-several-cities-test-positive-for-coronavirus-stirring-fears-of-spread-among-first-responders/2020/03/28/b88b17f4-6f9a-11ea-a3ec-70d7479d83f0_story.html.

programs, which already provide critical support for law enforcement and first responder mental health, will be met with increased demand as we face the consequences of the pandemic.

Our first responders across the country are dealing with an unprecedented situation that will take both a physical and mental toll. Congress should act and provide these heroes with the support they need. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Todd Young
United States Senator