

United States Senate

April 23, 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:

We write to respectfully request that any future legislation to address the ongoing coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) includes resources to address the specific, urgent housing needs of domestic and sexual violence survivors during this unprecedented time.

As you know, domestic violence survivors are not safe at home and the danger they face is exacerbated by stay-at-home orders and social distancing. Sexual assault survivors may also experience housing instability due to trauma and the ongoing economic upheaval caused by COVID-19, and homeless individuals remain at high risk of sexual violence. Communities need a surge of resources to meet survivors' diverse housing needs, increase the capacity of local programs to address those needs, and be responsive to the housing availability in each community. Local programs are working to reduce the number of families in their shelters to respond to calls for social distancing. Some shelters will not be admitting new clients but will be looking to house clients in hotels, motels, or rental properties. Others are working to support survivors who have recently secured independent housing only to lose their jobs and economic stability as a result of COVID-19. Once the immediate health crisis subsides, there will be an influx of need as survivors make plans to escape while facing continued economic strain.

We appreciate that the CARES Act provides \$45 million in supplementary funding for emergency shelter and support for domestic violence survivors through the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) as well as \$4 billion for Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) and other housing resources, some of which will be available to help survivors. However, critical housing needs remain for survivors and their children, who are uniquely challenged during this pandemic.

Therefore, we respectfully request that any future legislation to address COVID-19 include the following:

- **\$20 million in Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) housing vouchers.** VAWA housing vouchers are needed to help survivors who need a housing subsidy to escape violence. Vouchers will help survivors avoid homelessness and keep them from needing to go to an emergency shelter, which are working to reduce the number of residents to adhere to public health requirements.
- **\$100 million in additional Domestic Violence Bonus Funds.** Domestic Violence (DV) Bonus Funds provide dedicated funding for rapid re-housing, transitional housing, and survivor-centered supportive service projects that assist survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking in accessing lifesaving housing resources. Additional funds allocated through the DV Bonus should supplement existing grants and provide new grants to victim service providers to help survivors move quickly. Supplemental resources would also allow communities to provide longer and deeper subsidies to survivors who are facing job loss and other economic instability. Flexibility is critical, so all match requirements should be removed from this funding stream to make it as accessible as possible for programs to serve and house survivors.

Survivors of domestic and sexual violence deserve safety and shelter during this difficult and uncertain time. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

/s/ Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez
United States Senator

/s/ Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen
United States Senator