



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0916

April 27, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, the Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, the Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader McConnell,

The next coronavirus relief package addressed by Congress must expand eligibility to include local governments that are struggling to confront the impact of the pandemic.

Under the CARES Act passed last month, states and cities and counties with more than 500,000 people are eligible for assistance through the Coronavirus Relief Fund.

This arbitrary threshold disadvantages many local governments, including two of the three counties I represent. Both Manatee and Sarasota counties are straining to cope with growing COVID-19 caseloads, rising costs, and significant revenue losses. They deserve assistance just as much as any city or county that has 500,000 people.

Manatee County has 403,000 residents, 521 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 42 deaths. It has the 4th highest number of deaths in the entire state. Manatee Memorial Hospital has been severely impacted by the pandemic and has furloughed employees. In fact, the hospital has more COVID-19 cases than Tampa General Hospital, which has received relief funds. This is yet another powerful rationale for enlarging the eligibility standards.

Sarasota County has 433,000 residents, 321 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 32 deaths to date. Sarasota Memorial Hospital also has been seriously harmed by the outbreak, announcing a loss of \$16 million in March, furloughs and salary reductions. Additional losses are expected in April and May.

In the next coronavirus assistance package, Congress should lower the minimum population requirement to 400,000 residents. This revision is fully consistent with the original intent behind the Coronavirus Relief Fund and would enable more local governments to receive aid.

According to one economic forecast, the combined Sarasota-Manatee economy is

facing the possibility of a massive \$2.3 billion economic slump over the next 90 days because of the coronavirus. StratoDem Analytics, an economic data firm located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, estimates Sarasota County's GDP will decline by about 25 percent in the 2nd quarter of 2020. For Manatee County, it is estimating a 28 percent GDP decline. Measured on a per household basis in each county, that's an \$6,300 economic loss in Sarasota County and an \$5,700 loss in Manatee County from April through June.

Manatee and Sarasota counties miss meeting the current population requirement by small margins. Congress needs to expand the eligibility criteria to help state and local governments like Manatee and Sarasota counties get through this public health and economic crisis.

I look forward to working with the leaders in both parties to make sure that relief funds are helping as many local governments as possible. Adopting this modest change to the Coronavirus Relief Fund would enable us to achieve this essential mission.

Sincerely,



Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress