



## **Congresswoman Abby Finkenauer** *Iowa's First Congressional District*

### **Congresswoman Finkenauer's Priorities for Coronavirus Relief**

As Congress reopens discussion on legislation to slow the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic and speed our recovery from its economic impacts, Congresswoman Abby Finkenauer (IA01), is offering several key priorities that should be contained in the next aid package.

The priorities are necessary to ensure Iowans are equipped to respond to the pandemic, able to weather its economic fallout and ready to re-engage when our economy returns to normal. They fall into four general categories: Expanding Assistance for Hardworking Families; Standing by our Health Care Providers and Essential Workers; Looking out for Iowa Communities; and Protecting the Future of Iowa.

### **Expanding Assistance for Hardworking Families**

#### **Protect Health Care Coverage**

Iowans need confidence that during this public health crisis, losing their job won't mean losing their health care coverage. Now more than ever, we should be making it easier—not harder—for families to access high quality health care coverage. Our next aid package should:

- Create a special enrollment period to allow people to get care through the Health Insurance Exchanges;
- Subsidize workers' COBRA payments if they lose their job but want to keep their employer's insurance;
- Increase premium tax credits to help more people afford health insurance coverage, especially those facing financial hardship.

#### **Increase Direct Payments & Bolster Unemployment Benefits**

While Congress delivered on expanded unemployment benefits and direct assistance for Iowans in the CARES Act, there's more work to do. Our next package should include fixes for CARES Act programs that aren't operating as intended and, if needed, additional financial assistance. Specifically, the next bill should:

- Provide more direct assistance payments to families who need them;
- Allow parents to receive \$500 for all children that they claim as dependents—not just those under the age of 17—through the direct assistance provided under the CARES Act.
- Clarify how SSI or VA benefit recipients will get their payments and when;
- Shore up our state's unemployment systems so that we can handle the influx of new cases and provide temporary federal benefits beyond July 2020.

#### **Improve Aid for Students & Higher Education**

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More must be done to help our students through this difficult time and ensure they're prepared for success in the months and years ahead. Relief available to students and their families should be consistent across the board. For that reason, we should:

- Extend student loan deferment to borrowers of all types of student loans, especially all borrowers with Federal Family Education Loans;
- Provide colleges and universities with the resources necessary to guarantee that students participating in work study receive the compensation they earned;
- Provide additional aid for schools districts and institutions of higher education to fully meet their financial needs, adapt to changing enrollment projections, and provide distance learning for our students.

### **Standing by our Health Care Providers and Essential Workers**

#### Strengthen the Health Care Workforce

The pandemic threatens a rural health system that is already stretched thin. To ensure that everyone has access to a doctor during this critical time, we should:

- Ensure international physicians who went to school here and are practicing in the United States on a visa have the flexibility to practice in the areas of highest need during the pandemic, and specifically underserved rural areas;
- Include dedicated funds in the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund for locally managed rural hospitals and health providers to ensure they're able to keep their doors open.

#### Guarantee Adequate Safety Measures and Benefits

While some of us are fortunate enough to work from home, our health care providers and essential workers don't have that option. We need to keep them safe on the job and make sure their employers are fairly compensating them for difficult, stressful and sometimes dangerous work. In the next relief package we must:

- Require enforceable safety standards for employers whose workers are medical professionals or otherwise deemed essential;
- Provide hazard pay and other benefits to recognize these workers' important roles during this crisis;
- Ensure access to needed personal protective equipment (PPE) and rapid testing to ensure workplace safety.





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### Protect the Nation's Postal Service

We depend on the United State Postal Service for numerous critical functions, and its services are needed now more than ever. With so many Iowans not leaving their homes and depending on packages to receive prescription drugs, notes from loved ones and more, we must protect one of our oldest institutions. The next package should:

- Ensure the USPS continues to provide key services, is supported financially, and makes reasonable contributions to support its employees.

### **Looking out for Iowa Communities**

#### Direct Assistance for Local Governments

Congress must ensure our local governments, including Iowa's cities and counties, qualify for direct stabilization funding. The Coronavirus Relief Fund, established under the CARES Act, provides \$150 billion for state, local and tribal governments to cover costs related to COVID-19. Local governments with a population above 500,000 receive direct financial assistance under the program, while smaller communities must rely on allocations through the States, which also face immediate funding shortfalls.

This process delays financial assistance or eliminates it completely for local governments that desperately need funds to offset losses from the decline in economic activity caused by social distancing. The Coronavirus Relief Fund's current population threshold excludes every community in Northeast Iowa. We need to:

- Lower the population requirement so that our cities, like Dubuque, Cedar Rapids, and Waterloo as well as our counties receive the necessary funds to provide critical services.

#### Relief for the Agriculture Economy

Iowa plays a critical role in our nation's economy as a major player in the domestic food supply chain. From our farmers in the field to food processors on the factory line to those stocking the shelves at our local grocery stores, we must take action to protect our essential workers and support our essential industries to keep our supply chain strong. The CARES Act took important steps in this direction, but its programs will not be enough, especially amid the Administration's painful trade wars.

In the fourth supplemental, we should:

- Expand relief available to those whose markets have been cut due coronavirus, including our pork producers, cattlemen, and dairy farmers;
- Assist biofuels producers to stabilize this important market for our corn and soybean farmers;

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- Provide program flexibility to maximize the support available to farmers, processors, and retailers through all relevant federal agencies.

### Support for Iowa's Main Street Businesses

Small businesses are the heartbeat of Iowa communities and make up over 99 percent of our businesses. Unfortunately, they're also suffering the most from the social distancing measures necessary to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. Small businesses and their employees shouldn't shoulder this burden alone. We must:

- Ensure adequate funds are available for the Small Business Administration's forgivable loans and grants through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and ensure priority lending is given to small businesses in rural and underserved areas;
- Ensure additional types of businesses and organizations with demonstrated need for assistance are made eligible for assistance through Small Business Administration programs like the PPP;
- Institute commonsense fixes that will help simplify and clarify the process of distributing aid to small business for the benefit of both lenders and borrowers and ensure transparency in the process;
- Provide grants and forgivable loans for small businesses that fulfill federal contracts or retool their operation to manufacture critical supplies like PPE or ventilators.

### **Protecting the Future of Iowa**

#### Infrastructure Investments that Create Jobs and Strengthen our Communities

Future infrastructure investment must go toward projects in rural areas that create good jobs, enhance the transportation of goods and agricultural commodities, and repair or replace structurally deficient roads and bridges. While we may not address all of these needs through the our Coronavirus relief, we should:

- Ensure rural communities receive their fair share of new investments and direct spending on industries and infrastructure affected by the pandemic, such as our regional airports;
- Attach strong Davis-Bacon and Buy America standards to any Coronavirus-related infrastructure investments;
- Expand broadband deployment in rural areas to support telehealth efforts, connect students to online classrooms, enable more small business to work from home, and improve wireless connection capabilities.

#### Guarantee Retirement Security

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There are over 10.4 million Americans who rely on multiemployer pension and annuity plans for their retirement benefits. Protecting these plans means protecting the future of hardworking Iowans and their families. We must:

- Provide targeted assistance to plans that are struggling to stay afloat during this crisis to ensure pension security for hard-working Iowans and our businesses.

