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June 3, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer:

We face a historic moment where investments in a resilient human services system are an essential down payment to stimulate the economy. As state and local policymakers face difficult decisions on how to safely re-open their economies while supporting the health and well-being of their communities, the strength of our economic recovery rests on our ability to meet the basic needs of workers who have been displaced and create pathways for economic mobility. The challenge we face responding to the rapid and widescale economic disruption felt throughout the country is daunting; nearly 40% of households with income below \$40,000 reported a job loss in March and unemployment insurance claims have totaled more than 36.5 million as of early May.<sup>12</sup> The sudden and potentially lasting impact of the pandemic on the ability of millions of families to work, learn, and meet their basic needs necessitates a preventative approach that continues to prioritize keeping people safe and healthy while laying the groundwork for recovery.

The economic pressures caused by the pandemic are already placing enormous financial and operational strain on state and local systems that provide essential supports and economic opportunities for displaced workers and protect the health and well-being of children and families. Yet, the ability of human services agencies to rise to meet the social and economic challenges facing our communities will be a key determinant in the strength and resilience of our country's road to recovery. Building on our members' prior recommendations to address [rapid response issues caused by the pandemic](#) and to [meet urgent community needs and stabilize the underlying human services infrastructure](#), the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) recommends Congress adopts the following policies that invest in people and communities to drive an economic resurgence.

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<sup>1</sup> Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. *Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2019, Featuring Supplemental Data from April 2020*. May 2020.

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance Weekly Claims Data. Data as reported through May 9.

## **Human Services Budgets and Infrastructure**

Significant increases in human services demand paired with large budget shortfalls caused by the pandemic threaten the ability of state and local agencies to respond to ongoing needs during the economic recovery. To preserve our ability for human services agencies to both be a stabilizer and contribute to the economy during the long-term recovery, APHSA recommends the following:

- **Stabilize State and Local Budgets** – through direct federal aid that allows for replacement of lost revenue
- **Provide Enhanced Federal Match for State Human Services Spending** – through a temporary increase in the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) to 12% and a temporary increase in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) administrative match rate. Temporary increases should only be reduced once unemployment rates fall below 5%.
- **Increase Federal Cost Share for Human Services IT Expenditures** – to ensure delivery systems are modern and able to meet increased demand for online services through applying the 90% Federal Financial Participation rate for Medicaid information systems to all human services information technology investments
- **Increase Funding for the Social Services Block Grant** – as a mechanism with the flexibility for state and local agencies to be responsive to the needs of their communities
- **Provide Administrative Relief for Child Support Services** – by excluding temporary FMAP increases from TANF child support recoupment, temporarily matching state reinvestment of child support incentive funds, and temporarily waiving penalties for failure to meet child support performance measures as a result of the pandemic
- **Exclude Temporary FMAP Increases from TANF Child Support Recoupment** – to avoid inadvertently reducing the state share of child support collections from TANF recipients
- **Temporarily Match State Reinvestment of Child Support Incentive Funds** – to support administration of child support services during the economic recovery

## **Employment and Economic Well-Being**

The economic disruption caused by the public health emergency paired with structural economic changes as a result of the pandemic call for policymakers to ensure affected workers have the basic assistance they need in the short-term in addition to the services needed to achieve economic mobility in the long-term. APHSA recommends the following investments be made to support employment and economic well-being:

- **Provide Increased Funding for Basic Assistance and Work Supports** – through an emergency fund focused on cash assistance, short-term non-recurrent benefits, subsidized employment, kinship caregiver grants, and primary prevention for household emergencies that keep families safely together
- **Exclude Public Health Emergency Period from TANF Time Limits** – including the 60-month lifetime limit on benefits and the 24-month limit on benefits without engaging in work
- **Provide a Two-Year TANF Extension** – to ensure continuity of work supports during the economic recovery

- **Invest in Resources to Align TANF, WIOA, and SNAP E&T** – through funding for workforce response activities, labor market insights, and information technology supports with dedicated set asides for low- and moderate-income households
- **Adopt Incremental TANF Reforms Focused on Employment Outcomes** – that reflect the need to retrain displaced workers in industries slow to return by relaxing time limits for vocational education, job-search, and job-readiness activities, as well as eliminating restrictions on core vs. non-core activities

### **Nutritional Supports**

With unemployment rates at historic levels and schools and child care centers where children receive meals closed, there has been a sharp increase in children and families that rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to meet their nutritional needs. Data from the early weeks of the pandemic show more than one in five households report experiencing food insecurity, with even higher rates among families that have lost work or income.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, SNAP is one of the most effective per dollar federal investments to boost local employment, with studies showing that each dollar invested in SNAP results in a 150% return in GDP.<sup>4</sup> With heightened demand for SNAP and need for investments in local employment expected to endure through the economic recovery, APHSA recommends the following SNAP policies be adopted by Congress.

- **Prioritize Child Nutrition Investments that Efficiently get Help to those who Need it** – by extending authority for Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) benefits through the summer and until schools reopen, expanding eligibility to children under six receiving meals through child care centers, and permitting states to use presumptive eligibility based on receipt of SNAP and other public assistance benefits at this time when child care data are largely unavailable
- **Grant Administrative Relief on P-EBT Implementation** – by providing full federal reimbursement for administrative expenses incurred to deliver P-EBT benefits through SNAP
- **Temporarily Waive College Student Work Requirements** – by allowing states the option to continue serving existing SNAP-participating college students as well as qualify newly impacted college students that are unable to work as a result of the pandemic
- **Establish a Separate Fund to Cover Online Delivery Fees** – for SNAP participants susceptible to health complications from COVID-19 that need safe access to groceries
- **Suspend Pending Rulemaking for Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility** – that would limit states' ability during the recovery to provide SNAP benefits as a bridge support to TANF recipients transitioning toward economic mobility
- **Exclude Pandemic Unemployment Compensation from Countable Income** – consistent with the disregard of these benefits for Medicaid and CHIP eligibility

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<sup>3</sup> Urban Institute. *More than One in Five US Adults Experienced Food Insecurity in the Early Weeks of the Pandemic*. Elaine Waxman. April 28, 2020. <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/more-one-five-us-adults-experienced-food-insecurity-early-weeks-pandemic>

<sup>4</sup> USDA Economic Research Service, *SNAP Redemptions Contributed to Employment During the Great Recession*, May 28, 2019, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2019/may/snap-redemptions-contributed-to-employment-during-the-great-recession/>

- **Temporarily Increase SNAP Minimum and Maximum Benefits** – by raising the minimum benefit from \$16 to \$30 and increasing the maximum benefit by 15%

### **Child and Family Well-Being**

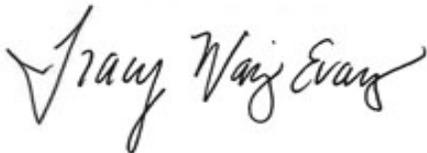
As families face an extended period of financial stress and social distancing, child welfare agencies need to adapt to meet new and emerging family needs. And while the pandemic has complicated progress being made to shift child welfare services towards preventing issues before they happen, it will be even more important for agencies to proactively prevent and mitigate childhood trauma. APHSA recommends Congress adopt the following actions.

- **Support Essential Child Abuse and Neglect Services through CAPTA** – by investing in community-based programs and activities that prevent child abuse and neglect (Title II) and state improvements to investigation, prosecution, and handling of child abuse and neglect (Title I)
- **Increase Funding for Title IV-B** – to support family preservation, reunification, and foster care services for children and families through the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services Program and Promoting Safe and Stable Families program.
- **Invest in Youth Aging Out of Foster Care** – through increased funding for the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program and by temporarily waiving spending limits on housing
- **Provide Additional Resources to Kinship Caregivers** – by appropriating additional funding for kinship navigator programs and providing kinship caregivers priority access to child care so they can meet the needs of children while working
- **Appropriate Funding for the Court Improvement Program** – to allow child welfare courts to invest in technology and operation improvements needed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to conduct timely and accessible hearings, reduce caseloads, and enhance quality legal representation

As our country faces the recovery ahead, state and local human services agencies stand with our federal partners to be a part of the solution to build resilient, thriving communities. We look forward to a continued dialogue with Congress and stand as a resource and ally to advance solutions that work. Please reach out to Ann Flagg, Senior Director of Policy & Practice, at [aflagg@aphsa.org](mailto:aflagg@aphsa.org) to discuss opportunities to work together in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

Tracy Wareing Evans



President and CEO  
American Public Human Services Association

Duke Storen



Chair, APHSA Leadership Council  
Commissioner, Virginia Department of Social Services

cc:

The Honorable Collin C. Peterson  
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable K. Michael Conaway  
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles "Pat" Roberts  
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,  
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U.S. Senate  
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The Honorable Deborah Stabenow  
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture,  
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The Honorable Richard E. Neal  
Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means  
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The Honorable Kevin P. Brady  
Ranking Member, Committee on Ways and  
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The Honorable Charles E. Grassley  
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The Honorable Ronald Wyden  
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