

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 13, 2020

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

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Democratic 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 you include critical provisions to support the victims of family violence, domestic violence and dating violence in the anticipated fourth supplemental package of legislation to address the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). We appreciate that the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act* included critical funding to begin to address the increased need for domestic violence-related services and supports. However, additional funding is required in order to more fully address the needs of victims and survivors.

On Sunday, April 5, 2020, the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called for governments around the world to help address the “horrificing global surge in domestic violence” by making services for victims and survivors a “key part of their national response plans for COVID-19.” The United States must demonstrate leadership in this effort by continuing to provide the additional resources needed to support at-risk families and children.<sup>1</sup>

Over the past several weeks, local, state, Tribal and federal policymakers have put in place aggressive measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. As of the writing of this letter, more than 300 million Americans in 42 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico, as well as in several cities, local municipalities and Tribal communities, are being advised to stay

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<sup>1</sup> Scott Neuman. *NPR*. “Global Lockdowns Resulting In ‘Horrificing Surge’ In Domestic Violence, U.N. Warns” (April 6, 2020). <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/06/827908402/global-lockdowns-resulting-in-horrifying-surge-in-domestic-violence-u-n-warns>; Amanda Taub. *The New York Times*. “A New Covid-19 Crisis: Domestic Abuse Rises Worldwide” (April 6, 2020). <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html>

at home if at all possible.<sup>2</sup> About 54 million K-12 students are no longer going to school in person,<sup>3</sup> and millions of adults are out of work.<sup>4</sup> As the pandemic continues, we expect these numbers to rise, and as a consequence, so will incidents of domestic violence. The National Domestic Violence Hotline has already reported contacts from victims saying their abusers are using COVID-19 as a reason to further isolate them from their friends and family. Some abusers are withholding financial resources or medical aid. Victims also face potentially dangerous circumstances by staying home in order to avoid infecting others.<sup>5</sup> Simply put, even though staying home is currently our best way to slow the spread of this deadly virus, home is not a safe place for people who experience domestic violence. As a result, communities around the country are reporting increased demands on victim service providers, which are facing new difficulties and complexities in assisting survivors.

Rural areas around the country are experiencing the same uptick in people seeking shelter from domestic violence, with further limited resources. American Indian and Alaska Native communities' disparities in shelter capacity and resources are being exacerbated by the virus. Many of these communities already experience overcrowding in homes and a lack of sanitation services and running water. We ask that Tribal sovereignty is acknowledged and the federal government fulfill its trust responsibility to Indian Tribes by providing equitable resources to American Indian and Alaska Native communities to respond to the violence. Shelters and Tribal advocacy programs are often all that stands between safety and Native women going missing and/or murdered (MMIW). In addition, because many rural Tribal communities lack the necessary infrastructure to take advantage of internet-based options, we ask that there be an outreach to these communities, whether from the federal departments or through enlistment of technical advisers who have established relationships with many of these communities.

Further, one of our most vulnerable populations – our children – are no longer going to school and may be at increased risk of abuse, in addition to having difficulty adapting to these trying times without the typical supports available to them. The disruptions to our daily lives because of the COVID-19 pandemic will likely have significant and long-term impacts on children. Emergency funding is sorely needed to equip state and local child protection entities to continue to respond as quickly as possible to the needs of children in the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the child protection workforce needs technological resources when virtual work is appropriate, and proper safety gear when face-to-face home visits and investigations are necessary. States and child welfare organizations also must be able

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<sup>2</sup> Holly Secon and Aylin Woodward. *Business Insider*. "About 95% of Americans have been Ordered to Stay at Home. This Map Shows which Cities and States are under Lockdown" (April 7, 2020).

<https://www.businessinsider.com/us-map-stay-at-home-orders-lockdowns-2020-3>

<sup>3</sup> Dante Chinni. *NBC News*. "School Closures Skyrocket, nearly 54 Million Students Sent Home" (March 22, 2020). <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/meet-the-press/school-closures-skyrocket-nearly-54-million-students-sent-home-n1165946>

<sup>4</sup> Heather Long. *The Washington Post*. "Over 10 Million Americans Applied for Unemployment Benefits in March as Economy Collapsed" (April 2, 2020). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/04/02/jobless-march-coronavirus/>

<sup>5</sup> Melissa Godin. *TIME*. "As Cities Around the World Go on Lockdown, Victims of Domestic Violence Look for a Way Out" (March 18, 2020). <https://time.com/5803887/coronavirus-domestic-violence-victims/>

to appropriately respond to increases in child maltreatment, which – as we know from previous disasters – will result from this crisis.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the lack of resources and severity of domestic violence are often heightened for survivors living at the margins, including those living in rural communities, individuals with disabilities, older adults, immigrants, those identifying with faith-based communities, youth and others. These underserved populations are often reluctant to seek assistance. And when they do, they frequently look for support in their immediate communities and from organizations that they trust.<sup>7</sup> Culturally specific organizations and programs need additional funding to provide resources for survivors. This includes services that are language-accessible to hard-to-reach populations in order to keep victims and their families safe.

Several service providers for victims of domestic violence have reported an increase in demand for services, while also facing dire funding and staffing challenges associated with the stay-at-home orders. These organizations rely on federal funding, such as through the *Family Violence Prevention and Services Act* (FVPSA) and the *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act* (CAPTA). The *CARES Act* provided \$45 million for FVPSA, \$2 million for the National Domestic Violence Hotline and \$45 million for the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services Program. However, while that funding will be helpful, it is a drop in the bucket compared to what is needed. That is why we respectfully request for a fourth supplemental package that addresses the COVID-19 pandemic to include the following:

#### **Support for shelter and supports, resource centers and technical assistance**

- At least an additional \$100 million for FVPSA programs, including funding for:
  - the Specialized Services for Abused Parents and their Children Demonstration Grant and technical assistance;
  - the Training and Technical Assistance Resource Centers;
  - the Emerging Issue Capacity Building Centers; and
- At least \$100 million for the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to coordinate language-accessible public outreach to hard-to-reach populations.

#### **Set-aside assistance for Tribes and Tribal Organizations (in addition to the above allocation)**

- \$100 million FVPSA funds set aside for Tribal governments; and
- \$1 million to be split evenly between the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center and Alaska Native Women's Resource Center.

#### **Support for children**

- In addition to the funding for Specialized Services for Abused Parents and their Children, we urge you to include robust increases in emergency supplemental funding

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<sup>6</sup> Vann R. Newark, II. *The Atlantic*. "The Kids Aren't All Right" (March 24, 2020).

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/03/what-coronavirus-will-do-kids/608608/>

<sup>7</sup> J. Edward Moreno. *The Hill*. "Black, Latino Communities Suffering Disproportionately from Coronavirus, Statistics Show" (April 7, 2020). <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/491518-black-latino-communities-suffering-disproportionately-from-coronavirus>

under Titles I and II of CAPTA for programs that strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect.

We also ask that you waive the matching requirements under FVPSA and under Title II of CAPTA so workers on the ground can have the flexibility required to swiftly respond to the needs of survivors during this public health crisis.

While we must continue to work together and do everything possible to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must also ensure the public health *and safety* of all Americans. For the 1.2 million survivors of family violence, domestic violence and dating violence in this country, it is imperative that they be able to access the essential services supported by these programs. We urge you to prioritize the needs of survivors in the next supplemental package.

Sincerely,

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

/s/ Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

/s/ Doug Jones  
United States Senator

/s/ Dan Sullivan  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

/s/ Thom Tillis  
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie Hirono  
United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator

/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed  
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

/s/ Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith  
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

/s/ Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

/s/ Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

/s/ Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator

/s/ Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator

Cc:

The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies, United States Senate Appropriations Committee  
The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Agencies, United States Senate Appropriations Committee  
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker, United States House of Representatives  
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Minority Leader, United States House of Representatives