

May 14, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

The undersigned organizations applaud the inclusion of the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program in the HEROES Act and recommend its inclusion in emergency COVID-19 legislation with funding appropriated for FY2020 and FY2021. This program would strengthen and rebuild the depleted governmental public health workforce, which serves as the front lines of the COVID-19 response.

The public health workforce is the backbone of our nation's governmental public health system at the county, city, state, and tribal levels. These skilled professionals are the primary resource necessary to deliver public health programs and services: they lead efforts to ensure the tracking and surveillance of infectious disease outbreaks such as COVID-19, prepare for and respond to natural or man-made disasters, and ensure the safety of the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink. Health departments employ full-time nurses, behavioral health staff, community health workers, environmental health workers, epidemiologists, health educators, nutritionists, lab workers and others who use their unique skill sets to do all they can to keep people in their communities healthy and safe. While the current COVID-19 outbreak has raised the profile of public health workers, they have a long track record of protecting our communities out of the spotlight, preventing illness and harm.

While the importance of these professionals cannot be understated, health departments across the country face significant workforce challenges to maintaining robust staffing levels and recruiting and retaining needed professionals. The public health workforce was hit hard by the Great Recession, and whereas much of the rest of the public sector workforce has recovered or grown, local and state health departments have not. In fact, local and state health departments have lost nearly a quarter (23%) of their workforce since 2008, shedding over 50,000 jobs across the country. The deficiency is compounded by the age of the public health workforce – nearly 55% of public health professionals are over the age of 45 and almost a quarter of health department staff are eligible for retirement. Between those who plan to retire and those who plan to pursue opportunities in the private sector (often due to low wages), nearly half of the local and state health department workforce might leave over the next several years. We need to do more to get the right people into these jobs and keep them there.

This is why the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program is so important. It will help incentivize new and recent graduates to join the governmental public health workforce, encourage them to stay in these roles, and strengthen the public health workforce as a whole. It would provide up to \$35,000 per year in loan repayment in exchange for a two-year commitment to their important work. New staff and volunteers are being brought into the field for the COVID-19 response. This program would provide an added incentive to keep them long term and help ensure that their experience is harnessed and available before the next crisis hits.

Thank you for your commitment to our nation's public health. Again, we urge you to include the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program in the next COVID-19 emergency package with funding appropriated.

Please contact Eli Briggs, Senior Government Affairs Director at the National Association of County and City Health Officials, at ebriggs@naccho.org, with any questions.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

American Association on Health and Disability

American Geriatrics Society

American Lung Association

American Psychological Association

American Public Health Association

American Society of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene

ARCH Community Health Coalition

Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology

Association of Community Health Nursing Educators

Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs

Association of Public Health Laboratories

Association of Public Health Nurses

Association of Public Health Nurses (APHN)

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health

Association of State and Territorial Health Officials

CAEAR Coalition

Coalition of National Health Education Organizations

Eta Sigma Gamma

Families USA

Lakeshore Foundation

National Association of County and City Health Officials

National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health

National Coalition of STD Directors

National Environmental Health Association

National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association

National WIC Association

Prevent Blindness

Prevention Institute

Rural Nurses Organization

Safe States Alliance

School-Based Health Alliance

The AIDS Institute

The Gerontological Society of America

The Society for Public Health Education

Trust for America's Health

Vaccinate Your Family

Local/State Organizations

Arizona Local Health Officer Association (ALHOA)

Association of Ohio Health Commissioners, Inc. (AOHC)

Baltimore City Health Department

Bluegrass Community Health Center (KY)

Bourbon County Health Department (KY)

Bracken County Health Department (KY)

Breathitt County Health Department (KY)

Bryant Family Medicine (KY)

Buffalo Trace District Health Department (KY)

Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials

Fairview Community Health Center (KY)

Florence Medical Group (KY)

Giles Family Counseling Services (KY)

Greenup County Health Department (KY)

Indiana State Association of City and County Health Officials

Kent County Health Department (MD)

Kentucky Health Departments Association

Kentucky Public Health Association
Kentucky Rural Health Association
Knox County Health Department (KY)
Lexington-Fayette County Health Department (KY)
Lincoln County Health Department (KY)
Local Public Health Association of Minnesota
Marshall County Health Department (KY)
Maryland Association of County Health Officers
Massachusetts Health Officers Association
Mercy Health- Marcum and Wallace Hospital (KY)
Michigan Association for Local Public Health
Missouri Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors
New York State Association of County Health Officials
Oldham County Health Department (KY)
Powell County Health Department (KY)
Primary Care Centers of Eastern Kentucky
Public Health - Idaho North Central District
Three Rivers District Health Department (KY)
Tulsa Health Department (OK)
University of Maryland School of Nursing
Washington Thoracic Society
Whitley County Health Department (KY)