

Office of the Governor
State of Louisiana

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March 18, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President and Vice President:

First, let me thank you for your support throughout this crisis. In addition to the appropriations for assistance to states and local governments and the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Vice President has hosted several teleconferences, your Surgeon General has visited, and your FEMA team is on the ground here in Louisiana assisting in every way possible and many of the members of your coronavirus task force have been personally available to me and our team in Louisiana.

Unfortunately, Louisiana clearly is a hot spot for COVID-19 in the United States. As of Wednesday morning, we have 240 cases and four deaths. In the City of New Orleans alone, there are 176 positive cases. Right now, there are more cases in that city alone than in many states. Louisiana's per capita growth rate of cases is one of the highest in the country. Using federal guidance and direction, I have implemented aggressive social distancing measures, including closing schools, bars, casinos, gyms, movie theaters, and restricting restaurants to delivery, drive through and takeout orders only. I have also banned gatherings of more than 50 people. All of these steps we take in hope of "flattening the curve" in Louisiana, though we expect our case count to continue to rise for several weeks.

As I'm sure you know, we continue to adapt to this ongoing pandemic through policy implementation, as well as providing assistance to the health care sector, first responders and the general public. As the crisis advances, we are continuing to evaluate and assess the impacts of the disaster, and to foresee coming impacts. As we do so, it is clear that we will need additional resources to respond adequately to the unmet needs of the people and businesses of Louisiana. We will need to provide assistance for businesses and their employees due to the negative economic impacts of the necessary mitigation measures we are putting in place to protect the health and safety of our people. We also need to be able to ensure that children, who are out of school, and

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our older population, who are largely remaining isolated indoors, can easily get the nourishment they need during the crisis. Our needs are great, and I would like to take this opportunity to request policy accommodations that will help us improve our response capabilities.

To ensure those who are most in need are able to access food, I am requesting an expansion of the hot food waiver from the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service to allow the purchase of hot foods with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in restaurants in Louisiana. This would give our people more options for food in this difficult time and, in addition, would support our local small businesses, who are struggling as well.

Louisiana has experienced multiple major disasters over the past 15 years, many of which have resulted in allocation of Community Development Block Grants for Disaster Recovery. While the vast majority of these funds have been expended in various recovery activities like rebuilding people's homes, helping businesses get back on their feet, and rebuilding lost infrastructure, there are still unspent funds in some of these accounts that could provide a great boost to our response capabilities related to the COVID-19 outbreak. The language in each of the appropriations that has provided recovery assistance in the past has included a requirement that the funds only be expended to address the impacts of the respective covered disaster. Reversing this requirement through new legislation could free up millions of dollars of existing federal funds to battle this epidemic, with no additional federal budgetary impact. Relaxing some of the administrative constraints on the funds could dramatically speed the flow of these funds to combat the crisis. Below is a list of actions that could quickly put millions of dollars of assistance at our disposal in this fight with no impact on the federal budget:

- Eliminate the restriction on use of CDBG-DR funds for purposes tied directly to the covered disasters. This would free up millions of dollars that are currently idle for use battling the coronavirus and its effects. This would require congressional action.
- Waive NEPA compliance requirements for funded activities. This would require both legislative and administrative (HUD) actions.
- Eliminate the standard requirements for Citizen Participation related to a substantial amendment to an Action Plan for use of CDBG-DR. This would require administrative action by HUD.

These changes would allow us to more quickly provide assistance to small businesses and their employees, supplement feeding operations for children and the at-risk population, assist those who face housing crises due to lost income, and many other activities that will help us combat the effects of the crisis.

Louisiana and other states also participate in HUD's CDBG-State's program (CFDA 14.228), which provides funding to provide housing, infrastructure improvements, and economic development to benefit low-to-moderate income citizens in non-entitlement incorporated jurisdictions. This program has numerous restrictions that are preventing speedy use of these funds for combatting the coronavirus, including 45-day public notice requirements of our plans and programs. Implementing the following changes to this program would make an additional \$22 million available to Louisiana for this fight, and would have similar impacts around the country.

- Eliminate need for standard Citizen Participation related to a substantial amendment to the Consolidated Plan (Administrative)
- Eliminate restriction on expenditures other than through non-entitlement local governments (Statutory)
- Waive NEPA compliance on activities (Administrative)
- Allow for the use of urgent need as a national objective and use the emergency declaration as the basis of the use of urgent need. (HUD guidance or interpretation)
- Waive the 15% cap on public services (Statutory)

Additionally, the following list of recommendations for FEMA related programs and authorities would greatly assist state and local partners as they deal with the impacts of this event.

- In addition to the emergency declaration that is currently in place, declaring a major disaster declaration that specifically includes the Individual Assistance Program to allow for direct reimbursement to impacted individuals, disaster unemployment insurance, mass care, and disaster housing programs.
- Increasing the small project threshold for FEMA Public Assistance to \$1m to expedite reimbursement and reduce administrative complexities for FEMA, state and local partners.
- Increasing the Federal share for FEMA Public Assistance to reduce the economic burden on state and local partners that are experiencing significant economic impacts.

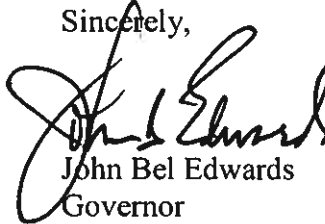
Extend the application deadline for an additional 90 days for the Homeland Security Grant Program, Non-Profit Security Grant Program and the Emergency Management Grant Program as state and local partners are fully dedicated to current mission of responding to the COVID-19 impacts.

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- Extend appeal deadlines for an additional 90 days for the FEMA Public Assistance Program to allow for resources that are currently dedicated to responding to COVID-19 to remain engaged in that task without negatively impacting their appeal opportunities.

We are working around the clock to stop the spread of this virus so we can protect our people's health, as well as the jobs they depend on, but we still have far to go and I am asking for your continued support as we seek to make every possible tool available for this fight.

Sincerely,



John Bel Edwards
Governor

cc: Louisiana Delegation