

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 23, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Shelby and Blunt, Vice Chairman Leahy and Ranking Member Murray:

As Congress considers options for additional federal support to communities in response to the coronavirus or “COVID-19” pandemic, we write to urge the Committee to provide robust funding for state, local and tribal Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) clinics. As our country continues to respond to this public health crisis, it will require support from every corner of the healthcare system. STD clinics are uniquely qualified to respond to COVID-19 because their providers have extensive training in infectious diseases, have existing infrastructure to quickly pivot to address emerging threats and already have in place testing and treatment capacity.

These STD clinics need federal support for significant service network transitions to coronavirus testing sites including: building physical infrastructure to test and treat coronavirus patients; implementing telehealth and digital health options; strengthening electronic medical records and integrating infectious disease surveillance systems to support tracking and response to the COVID-19 outbreak; and developing centers of excellence to build capacity of infectious disease providers to respond to this and future infectious disease outbreaks. Increased federal funding will help states and local jurisdictions provide surge capacity to respond to COVID-19 as well as expand and improve STD outreach, services and surveillance during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

As STD clinics work to bring COVID-19 under control, there remain concerns about the rising rates of STDs and other infectious diseases. STDs are at epidemic levels, and in a field that is already woefully underfunded, there must continue to be dedicated clinics for testing and treating new cases, otherwise rising STD rates will continue unabated. Data released in October 2019 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that after five years of dramatic increases, combined cases of syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia reached all-time highs in the U.S. Additionally, mother-to-child transmission of syphilis (congenital syphilis) increased by more than 40 percent between 2017 and 2018, resulting in a 22 percent increase in newborn deaths. This number is expected to drastically increase due to years of limited resources, and the much-needed redistribution of STD resources to fight COVID-19. Providing a substantial increase in funding for STD clinics will not only support

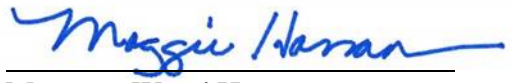
clinics in responding to COVID-19, but also will ensure they have the capacity to identify and treat new STD cases when they are able to re-open at full capacity.

Addressing COVID-19 requires a strong federal investment and commitment to strengthening the public health infrastructure. Together we must work to ensure that the federal response to COVID-19 include robust funding for STD clinics.

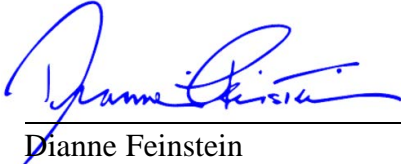
Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



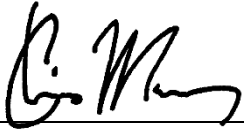
Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator