

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 29, 2020

Senator Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
S-128, The Capitol
Washington DC 20510

Senator Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
S-146A, The Capitol
Washington DC 20510

Senator John Kennedy
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Financial Services & General Government
133 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Senator Christopher Coons
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Financial Services & General Government
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Chairman Shelby, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairman Kennedy, and Ranking Member Coons:

As the Senate begins the process of negotiating and considering the next coronavirus pandemic relief supplemental appropriations bill, we urge you to include significant additional funding to modernize federal information technology (IT) systems through the Technology Modernization Fund (TMF).

Congress created the TMF in 2017 through the Modernizing Government Technology Act to help federal agencies rapidly execute IT modernization projects that meet specific criteria. The TMF is governed by an eight-member board of federal IT, financial management, and acquisition experts with significant transparency and ample opportunity for Congressional oversight, including periodic reports to Congress and submission of spending plans. Since 2018, the TMF has sponsored a range of IT system modernizations with specific benefits to citizen services and transitioning outdated systems to more modern platforms.

The federal COVID-19 response has dramatically exposed the failures of outdated, legacy federal IT systems and shone a light on the need for agencies to more quickly modernize their networks. For example, in its June 2020 report, the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee identified multiple agencies where IT systems struggle to accommodate large percentages of teleworking federal employees, causing system problems that slow the pace of normal functions like claims processing, increasing security risk, and making telework inefficient and frustrating. In other cases, small business owners and citizens were deeply frustrated by poorly functioning claims systems. While some federal agencies are to be commended for heroic efforts to address these challenges using small amounts of funding in the CARES Act, their individual successes highlight the scale of the remaining needs.

Congress authorized the TMF specifically to rapidly advance projects that can have an impact quickly, subject to oversight of a board of experts and specific criteria. We should provide a major funding allocation to the TMF now for projects that will provide the bandwidth, security, and functionality needed to make teleworking federal workers just as productive at home as in the office, and for other urgent COVID-19 response needs such as scaling claims processing systems, improving the security of citizen information, enhancing fraud prevention, and addressing long-delayed and well documented enterprise legacy IT systems modernizations.

As you are aware, the HEROES Act, passed by the House of Representatives on May 15, 2020, included \$1 billion for the TMF, to remain available until the end of Fiscal Year 2022. We urge you to include the same level of funding for TMF in the next COVID-19 supplemental spending bill to help address technology and related risks identified during the ongoing COVID-19 response.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to working with you on this and other matters.

Sincerely,

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Dianne Feinstein

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

Robert P. Casey
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

cc: Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer