



Thursday, July 30, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Democratic Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leaders McConnell, Schumer, and McCarthy,

Thank you for your steadfast leadership during this unprecedented public health crisis.

As an advocate for more than 53 million unpaid family caregivers across America, I write to urge your consideration of their health, wellbeing, and financial security as you draft the next COVID-19 relief package.

I am an epidemiologist by training, and prior to becoming executive director of the Rosalynn Carter Institute (RCI), spent years engaging communities on how to best report and respond to emerging health threats. In a recent conversation with our founder, former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, she again emphasized the importance of listening to experts across government, science, and medicine as we continue to navigate our COVID-19 response. And as always, she encouraged me to remind you how isolating and stressful aspects of caregiving can be. Caregivers and their loved ones are both vulnerable to this virus and to the added challenges it is creating.

On behalf of the caregivers we serve, thank you for the following elements currently within the HEALS Act and the HEROES Act. We respectfully ask that these provisions are retained in the final bill:

- **Extending stimulus check financial support to dependents of all ages.** Research has shown that more than three quarters of caregivers incur significant out-of-pocket costs - averaging roughly \$7,000 per year – because of caregiving. With limited access to resources, services, and supports, caregivers are more stretched than ever, and these \$500 stimulus checks will help. Thank you for this important new provision.
- **Extending telehealth options.** Home is the new hospital and unpaid family caregivers are on the frontline, providing care. Telehealth has proven essential to caregivers and their care recipients by reducing the need to leave home for non-urgent care and improving their ability to participate in medical visits and ensure proper follow up. Moreover, research has shown that caregivers prioritize the health of their care recipient and neglect their own. Telehealth has helped the caregivers prioritize their personal physical and mental health care too. As you know, higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health effects are common among family caregivers. Thank you for extending telehealth and increasing funding for mental and behavioral health interventions.

“There are only four kinds of people in the world:
those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers,
those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers.” — Rosalynn Carter



- **Continuing interventions for food security.** Food insecurity is on the rise. Older Americans rely upon food assistance and are less likely to be able to order groceries online. The HEALS and HEROES Act have many important interventions to maintain elder food security and we thank you for those investments.

On behalf of the unpaid family caregivers we serve, please consider including the following in the final bill:

- **Study the long-term effect on caregivers caring for loved ones recovering from COVID-19.** We applaud the \$290M funding increase for the NIH's National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute included in the HEALS Act. The Institute is conducting an important longitudinal study around the effects of COVID-19 exposure with their RED and BLUE CORAL studies. This unique and in-depth look at the impact of COVID-19 could be expanded to assess the long-term impacts on family caregivers. Given the potential decades long support that caregivers provide, it would be a missed opportunity to not think about ways to maximize this research investment. The learnings from caregivers and care recipients recovering from COVID-19 (especially those who spent time in an ICU) could inform dementia caregiver and TBI caregiver support, as the cognitive test scores have been shown to be similar.
- **Expand paid family leave beyond childcare to include eldercare.** School closures may keep school-aged children home, but please consider the tens of millions of working Americans who also care for adult or aging family member at home. These caregivers are navigating lost access to respite care, adult day care, and home healthcare workers. In alignment with the HEROES Act, lifting the 500-employee cap and expanding the family caregiver qualification to all ages would be a tremendous benefit.
- **Ensure family caregiver access to SAMHSA grants.** As you continue to provide states with SAMHSA grants for community healthcare and engagements, consider expanding grant opportunities to caregiver support programs to ensure our frontline unpaid family caregivers have accessible interventions.

Thank you again for your tireless work on behalf of all Americans as we continue to fight this pandemic, and for your consideration of these ideas to increase unpaid family caregiver supports. If I can be of any help to you and your staff, please do not hesitate to call (202) 431-0646 or email Jennifer.Olsen@GSW.edu.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Olsen".

Jennifer Olsen, DrPH

Executive Director, Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving

“There are only four kinds of people in the world:
those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers,
those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers.” — Rosalynn Carter