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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4209

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COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION
IN EUROPE (U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)

December 10, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
Appropriations Committee
H-307, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Chairwoman Lowey,

I am writing to request that any upcoming coronavirus relief package include an extension of the deadline by which Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) recipients must spend their funding.

The CRF, established by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, included \$150 billion in payments to help states, localities, Tribes and territories respond to the unanticipated costs of the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the country, local governments have distributed these funds to organizations and entities that have played a critical role in working to slow the spread of COVID-19 and keeping our communities safe. The CRF payments have been instrumental in implementing COVID-19 testing and tracing programs, establishing treatment sites, paying frontline health and safety workers, purchasing personal protective equipment, investing in telehealth and distance learning, supporting small businesses, and expanding and modifying nutrition programs, housing assistance, and homeless shelters to provide safe services for those impacted most significantly by this global health crisis.

Unfortunately, the deadline to use CRF payments is fast approaching, and any unused funds will have to be returned if unspent by December 30, 2020 – a mere 21 days from today. According to the most recent [report](#) from the Department of the Treasury, less than 25 percent of the \$142 billion in funds for state and local governments has been spent. In fact, due to a wide range of challenging circumstances, from pandemic-related construction delays and supply chain constraints to the Treasury Department's onerous program requirements, several local officials have indicated that there is simply not adequate time to plan and spend their allocated funds. Moreover, not all jurisdictions were afforded timely and equal access to

their allocations. For example, because the Treasury Department did not meet the statutory deadline to disburse CRF payments to Tribal governments, Tribes have had less time to spend their payments than other jurisdictions.

I strongly believe that states, localities and Tribes should not be penalized by an arbitrary deadline set by Congress in March. As we reach record-setting levels of new COVID-19 cases and deaths, we should take every action necessary to provide these jurisdictions flexibility in accessing and spending rightfully allocated CRF funds. Providing this extension is an important step, with no additional costs, to ensure our states, localities, territories, and Tribes have the resources and time to develop appropriate and effective plans for addressing this public health emergency.

Therefore, as you continue to negotiate a COVID-19 relief package before the end of the year, I respectfully urge you to support the local jurisdictions on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic by extending the deadline by which they and the organizations that received funding must spend their CRF payments beyond December 30, 2020. I am pleased to see that recently proposed drafts of COVID-19 relief legislation include this extension, and I ask you to ensure its inclusion in any final package.

I appreciate your consideration of this important request and look forward to our continued work together.

As always, I remain,

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Cohen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Steve" and last name "Cohen" clearly distinguishable.

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress