

May 26, 2020

The Honorable Tina Smith
720 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Cory Booker
717 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Smith and Booker:

The undersigned organizations applaud your introduction of the Strengthening the Public Health Workforce Act. The program authorized by this legislation would strengthen and rebuild the depleted governmental public health workforce, which serves as the front lines of the COVID-19 response.

The public health workforce is the backbone of our nation's governmental public health system at the county, city, state, and tribal levels. These skilled professionals are the primary resource necessary to deliver public health programs and services: they lead efforts to ensure the tracking and surveillance of infectious disease outbreaks such as COVID-19, prepare for and respond to natural or man-made disasters, and ensure the safety of the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink. Health departments employ full-time nurses, behavioral health staff, community health workers, environmental health workers, epidemiologists, health educators, nutritionists, lab workers and others who use their unique skill sets to do all they can to keep people in their communities healthy and safe. While the current COVID-19 outbreak has raised the profile of public health workers, they have a long track record of protecting our communities out of the spotlight, preventing illness and harm.

While the importance of these professionals cannot be understated, health departments across the country face significant workforce challenges to maintaining robust staffing levels and recruiting and retaining needed professionals. The public health workforce was hit hard by the Great Recession, and whereas much of the rest of the public sector workforce has recovered or grown, local and state health departments have not. In fact, local and state health departments have lost nearly a quarter (23%) of their workforce since 2008, shedding over 50,000 jobs across the country. The deficiency is compounded by the age of the public health workforce – nearly 55% of public health professionals are over the age of 45 and almost a quarter of health department staff are eligible for retirement. Between those who plan to retire and those who plan to pursue opportunities in the private sector (often due to low wages), nearly half of the local and state health department workforce might leave over the next several years. We need to do more to get the right people into these jobs and keep them there.

This is why the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program is so important. It will help incentivize new and recent graduates to join the governmental public health workforce, encourage them to stay in these roles, and strengthen the public health workforce as a whole. It would provide up to \$35,000 per year in loan repayment in exchange for a two-year commitment to their important work. New staff and volunteers are being brought into the field for the COVID-19 response. This program would provide an added incentive to keep them long term and help ensure that their experience is harnessed and available before the next crisis hits.

Thank you for your commitment to our nation's public health. Again, thank you for introducing the Strengthening the Public Health Workforce Act. We look forward to working with you to make the program a reality.

Please contact Eli Briggs, Senior Government Affairs Director at the National Association of County and City Health Officials, at ebriggs@naccho.org, with any questions.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

American Association for Clinical Chemistry

American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy

American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine

American Association on Health and Disability

American College of Clinical Pharmacy

American Dental Education Association

American Geriatrics Society

American Lung Association

American Psychological Association

American Public Health Association

American Society of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene

Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology

Association of Community Health Nursing Educators

Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs

Association of Public Health Laboratories

Association of Public Health Nurses

Association of Public Health Nurses (APHN)

Association of Schools Advancing Health Professions

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health

Association of State and Territorial Health Officials

CAEAR Coalition

Coalition of National Health Education Organizations

Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists

Eta Sigma Gamma

Families USA

GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality
Impetus - Let's Get Started LLC
International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium
Lakeshore Foundation
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health
National Association of State Emergency Medical Services Officials
National Black Nurses Association
National Board for Certified Counselors
National Coalition of STD Directors
National Environmental Health Association
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Hispanic Medical Association
National WIC Association
Prevent Blindness
Prevention Institute
Rural Nurses Organization
Safe States Alliance
School-Based Health Alliance
Spina Bifida Association
The AIDS Institute
The Gerontological Society of America
The Society for Public Health Education
Trust for America's Health
Vaccinate Your Family

Local/State Organizations

ARCH Community Health Coalition
Arizona Local Health Officer Association (ALHOA)

Association of Ohio Health Commissioners, Inc. (AOHC)

Baltimore City Health Department

Bluegrass Community Health Center (KY)

Bourbon County Health Department (KY)

Bracken County Health Department (KY)

Breathitt County Health Department (KY)

Bryant Family Medicine (KY)

Buffalo Trace District Health Department (KY)

Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials

Fairview Community Health Center (KY)

Florence Medical Group (KY)

Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky

Giles Family Counseling Services (KY)

Greenup County Health Department (KY)

Harrison County Home & Public Health (IA)

Indiana State Association of City and County Health Officials

Kent County Health Department (MD)

Kentucky Health Departments Association

KentuckyCare

Kentucky Public Health Association

Kentucky Rural Health Association

Knox County Health Department (KY)

Lexington-Fayette County Health Department (KY)

Lincoln County Health Department (KY)

Local Public Health Association of Minnesota

Marshall County Health Department (KY)

Maryland Association of County Health Officers

Massachusetts Health Officers Association

Mercy Health- Marcum and Wallace Hospital (KY)

Michigan Association for Local Public Health
Missouri Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Montgomery County Health Department (KY)
Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors
New Jersey Association of County and City Health Officials
New York State Association of County Health Officials
Oldham County Health Department (KY)
Powell County Health Department (KY)
Primary Care Centers of Eastern Kentucky
Public Health - Idaho North Central District
Queen Anne's County Department of Health (MD)
Three Rivers District Health Department (KY)
Tulsa Health Department (OK)
University of Maryland School of Nursing
Washington Thoracic Society
Washington Department of Health
Whitley County Health Department (KY)