



March 3, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I am writing to urge you in the strongest possible terms to quickly reconcile the House and Senate supplemental appropriations bills to address the threat of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and also to provide the highest possible funding level for research, prevention, control, and treatment of illnesses associated with the virus that is commensurate with the public health emergency that the virus represents. This funding should also be sufficient to enable the federal government to purchase adequate supplies for testing, treatment, and vaccines. We also strongly urge that funding for the federal effort to control COVID-19 should not come through taking funding away from other investments in federal healthcare programs and initiatives designed to maintain and expand primary care, ensure an adequate physician workforce, and promote public health. Lastly, ACP recommends that any funding package passed by Congress include the ability to waive telehealth restrictions for physicians during national emergencies.

The American College of Physicians is the largest medical specialty organization and the second-largest physician group in the United States. ACP members include 159,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists, and medical students. Internal medicine physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge and clinical expertise to the diagnosis, treatment, and compassionate care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness.

The COVID-19 virus is rapidly becoming a public-health emergency that poses a grave risk to Americans, especially to: people in geographic areas where ongoing community spread has been reported, healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19, individuals within close contact of people with COVID-19, and travelers returning to the United States from international locations with community spread.ⁱ Accordingly, there is simply no time to waste—with at least six COVID-19 deaths and 102 cases in the United States and rising—ⁱⁱCongress must make available all the needed resources so that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other federal departments and

agencies can continue the effort, such as providing guidance and support to state and local health departments, physicians and other clinicians, and the public. These resources should also enable the federal government to be able to amass large quantities of diagnostic test equipment, and when available, a vaccine for COVID-19 so that they can be made available to the public, especially seniors in Medicare, at no or limited cost through a nationwide vaccine campaign. We also request that Congress exercise caution so that funding for other essential health initiatives is not placed at risk in order to fund a COVID-19 response effort. Diverting funds from other healthcare programs may undermine the ability of the federal government to effectively administer the program as Congress intended.

The College also supports the lifting of telehealth restrictions for physicians during a national emergency within the Medicare program, similar to Section 9 of the bipartisan and bicameral CONNECT for Health Act, H.R. 4932 and S. 2741. Doing so would permit Medicare reimbursement for virtual visits regardless of originating site or geographic location. Patients experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 could gain greater access to physicians and would allow physicians to assess a patient more quickly.

We urge, therefore, that you expedite a supplemental appropriations package to the House and Senate for approval that would provide the highest funding level possible that is commensurate with the seriousness of this public health threat caused by COVID-19 virus. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert M. McLean". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the typed name.

Robert M. McLean, MD, MACP
President

ⁱ Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Summary, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 29, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html#risk-assessment>

ⁱⁱ 6 people have died from novel coronavirus in the US as cases nationwide surge, CNN, March 3, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/02/health/us-coronavirus-cases-monday/index.html>