

JUSTICE IN AGING

FIGHTING SENIOR POVERTY THROUGH LAW

February 10, 2021

The Honorable Frank Pallone Jr.
Chairman
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
United States House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Pallone:

Justice in Aging deeply appreciates your continued advocacy and work to ensure that the next COVID relief package prioritizes and address health disparities that COVID-19 has exacerbated. We are particularly grateful for your efforts to secure \$300 million for vaccine distribution and administration and \$2.5 billion for testing and contact tracing in high-risk and underserved populations, including racial and ethnic minority populations and rural communities, in the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021* and for your continued support for the *COVID Community Care Act*.

Justice in Aging fully supports the inclusion of targeted funding for medically underserved communities and the Indian Health Service, in the Energy & Commerce's Budget Reconciliation Legislative Recommendations Relating to Public Health. We appreciate the inclusion of funding for public outreach campaigns related to COVID-19 vaccines, testing, contact tracing, and other mitigation efforts are culturally responsive and multilingual. Many of the 6.5 million adults over age 60 who are limited English proficient are not getting the language access support they need to get vaccinated. **That is why we also urge the inclusion of direct funding for community-based organizations to carry out testing, tracing, vaccination, and public outreach services in the final COVID relief package.** Because they are integrated into the local communities, these organizations know the precise needs of the older adults and other individuals they serve as well as how best to reach them. They are also in the best position to repair the mistrust caused by historic and ongoing systemic racism. In short, community-based organizations are absolutely essential to effective public health interventions and ending this pandemic.

From the beginning of this pandemic, people of color, especially older adults and people with disabilities, have suffered the largest burden of illness, hospitalization and death. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services [data shows](#) that Black Medicare enrollees are hospitalized 2.65 times as often as white Medicare enrollees; Hispanic enrollees 2.12 times as often; and American Indian/Alaska Native enrollees 2.9 times as often. We also know that infection and death rates among certain members of the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities are exceedingly high but often masked by aggregated data. Now, we are seeing similarly alarming disparities in the rates of vaccinations. For example, white people are getting vaccinated at three times the rate compared to Black people in many places.

Thank you again for your continued efforts on this issue. Justice in Aging fully supports the Energy and Commerce Committee's text that provides targeted relief to communities disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic due to historic and systemic discrimination.

Sincerely,



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