

February 10, 2021

The Honorable Frank Pallone Jr.
Chairman, House Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone:

Public Health Jobs Now! and the undersigned organizations, representing leading public health experts, labor unions, grassroots advocates, anti-poverty organizations, racial justice organizations, community health groups, community-based organizations, community organizers, faith leaders, women and moms, and academic researchers, applauds the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee for inclusion of programs to build a public health workforce in the Energy & Commerce Committee's COVID-19 Relief Budget Reconciliation Legislation, intended for the budget reconciliation process. Major investments in a coordinated public health workforce program are crucial to standing up an effective pandemic response, gaining public trust, vaccinating and controlling epidemiological spread, and healing and rebuilding our communities. These investments will be particularly helpful in Black and brown communities that have been so hard hit.

The U.S. public health system had been underfunded and hollowed out by a decade of cuts. Since 2010, spending on state public health departments dropped 16% and spending on local health departments was down 18%.¹ Over 50,000 public health jobs have been lost since the Great Recession while the overall population has grown, leaving the country woefully underprepared and short-staffed.² With the recent availability of vaccines, the current size of the public health workforce has become even more inadequate as personnel are reallocated to vaccination campaigns, shuttering essential testing and contact tracing operations across the country.^{3,4,5} Furthermore, epidemic control activities for COVID-19 have drawn personnel away from other worsening health crises, such as mental illness, addiction, and other infectious diseases.

Therefore, we are encouraged that the public health workforce in the Energy & Commerce Committee's COVID-19 Relief Budget Reconciliation Legislation is modeled after aspects of

¹ Weber, L., Ungar L., Smith, M. R., Recht, H., Barry-Jester, A. M. (2020), *Hollowed-Out Public Health System Faces More Cuts Amid Virus*, Kaiser Health News and Associated Press. Available at: <https://khn.org/news/us-public-health-system-underfunded-under-threat-faces-more-cuts-amid-covid-pandemic/>.

² Barna, M. (2019), *More Public Health Grads Being Drawn to Private Sector Jobs*, The Nation's Health. Available at: <https://www.thenationshealth.org/content/49/6/1.2>.

³ Burk, M. (2021), *OSDH Changes Focus to Vaccinations, Reduces Contact Tracing*, <https://www.kswo.com>. Available at: <https://www.kswo.com/2021/01/27/osdh-changes-focus-vaccinations-reduces-contact-tracing/>.

⁴ Harris, A. (2021), *KCHD Limits COVID Tracing to Prioritize Vaccination Efforts*, <https://www.wvlt.tv>. Available at: <https://www.wvlt.tv/2021/01/11/kchd-limits-covid-tracing-to-prioritize-vaccination-efforts/>.

⁵ Wetsman, N. (2021), *Testing Sidelined as Health Departments Focus on Vaccination*, The Verge. Available at: <https://www.theverge.com/2021/1/26/22250574/covid-testing-vaccine-health-department-funding>.

H.R. 460 Health Force, Resilience Force, and Jobs to Fight COVID-19 Act. In particular we need to ensure that state and local health departments, via funding and guidance from the CDC, have the resources to create—in partnership with labor and community-based organizations—a coordinated, aligned and efficient public health response to crush this virus and build back a better and more inclusive public health system. Beyond COVID-19, we can set the entire country—rural and urban areas alike—on the path to healthier, stronger communities by providing much needed investment in our public health infrastructure and creating good permanent union jobs that will create opportunities for the communities most impacted by COVID-19. Black and Latina women and women with disabilities have experienced disparate rates of pandemic-related job loss and continue to face persistent unemployment.⁶ Thus, the creation of permanent jobs is vital to addressing structural inequity faced by historically marginalized groups.

We look forward to working with the Committee to ensure that a permanent cadre of public health jobs can be modeled after *H.R. 460 Health Force* so the nation can address long-standing racial inequities by making sure community groups, unions, and other local stakeholders have a voice in shaping public health priorities at the local level.

Americans across the political spectrum recognize the urgent need for a major new public health jobs corps to fight COVID-19, with 75% of likely voters, including 61% of Republicans, supporting the creation of such a program.⁷ Our public health system simply lacks the workforce to address the COVID-19 crisis and without a public health workforce program along the lines of *H.R. 460*, we will not be able to mobilize a response capable of protecting, healing and rebuilding our communities.

Sincerely,

Public Health Jobs Now!
Action NC
American Medical Student Association
American Muslim Health Professionals
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)
Bayard Rustin Liberation Initiative
Be A Hero
CASA
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for LGBTQ Economic Advancement & Research
Center for Popular Democracy Action

⁶ Ewing-Nelson, C. (2021), *All of the Jobs Lost in December Were Women's Jobs*, National Women's Law Center. Available at: <https://nwc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/December-Jobs-Day.pdf>.

⁷ Kapczynski, A., Gonsalves, G. and Hansmann, L. (2020), *The Case for a Community Health Corps: Responding to COVID-19 with a Jobs Program to Build a New Infrastructure of Care*, The Justice Collaborative Institute. Available at: <https://tjcinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Community-Health-Corps.pdf>.

Coalition on Human Needs
Community Change Action
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Delaware Alliance for Community Advancement (DelACA)
El Sol Neighborhood Educational Center
HealthBegins
Hispanic Federation
International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium
Marked By COVID
MomsRising
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
P.A.I.N. (Prescription Addiction Intervention Now)
Partners In Health
People's Action
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
Resilience Force
Right to Health Action
Rights & Democracy NH & VT
Rights and Democracy Institute
SEIU
Shriver Center on Poverty Law
The AIDS Institute
Union for Reform Judaism
Yale Global Health Justice Partnership