



Sen. Cathy Breen
Senate Chair

129th Maine Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on
Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Rep. Drew Gattine
House Chair

July 24, 2020

The Honorable Janet T. Mills
One State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Governor Mills,

As Maine responds to this unprecedented crisis, we continue to be proud that the shared sacrifices of our people and our businesses, alongside the effective leadership of Maine's government, has led to a strong response to the pandemic thus far. We are grateful that Maine's numbers of infections and deaths are comparatively low, and that our state has not seen the spike in infections that other parts of the country are experiencing at this time. Although we must proceed with great caution, there is cause for guarded optimism based on our experience to date.

Nevertheless, the pandemic continues to inflict tremendous hardship across our state. Mainers continue to be at great risk economically, as unemployment numbers remain high and small businesses struggle. Parents are worried about how our schools and institutions of higher learning will adapt. The disparate impacts on people of color are unacceptable and need to be addressed. We are facing a monumental amount of work in the months and years ahead to protect the health of our people and restore our economy.

The Appropriations and Financial Affairs (AFA) Committee has been meeting regularly and soliciting input across sectors regarding the impact COVID-19 is having on Mainers lives and their livelihoods. This could not have been possible without the partnership from your Administration and the information we have received from Commissioner Figueroa, Commissioner Johnson, Commissioner Makin, Director Pingree and others. Their help is invaluable.

Amidst this work, our committee remains aware of your desire to continue to work with us, especially with respect to the allocation of the \$1.25 billion in Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) that Maine received from Washington in April. Moreover, we understand that you have already

committed or spent a significant portion of these funds on certain immediate efforts, such as replenishing the Unemployment Trust Fund, supporting state-employed essential workers, and helping public schools meet the challenge of safely educating our students.

Additionally, we have been monitoring the work of the Economic Recovery Committee (ERC) and we applaud the commitment and effort that ERC members have contributed to Maine's path forward. We are in receipt of the July 15 report that the ERC has submitted for your consideration and have reviewed the specific recommendations respective to potential uses of CRF dollars. We wholeheartedly agree with the ERC on the urgent need to determine the best use of these dollars and to allocate these funds as quickly as possible, so that they can be put to the best use in helping struggling Maine people and small businesses.

The recommendations within the ERC report respective to the investment of CRF funds are consistent with what we have heard from Mainers during our recent meetings. They also closely align with the priorities outlined in the recent letter to you from the AFA Chairs. However, there are some notable differences. First, the ERC report does not directly address how Maine will close the gap in the marked disparities in health care and economic outcomes experienced by people of color and indigenous people. Closing this gap should be at the forefront of our efforts to respond to the pandemic in an equitable manner. Second, it does not focus on the specific needs of front line workers who have put their lives on the line to provide essential services to Maine people, especially to vulnerable populations served through contractual arrangements with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.

The committee has invited the ERC Chairs to meet with AFA on July 27th to present their report and discuss their recommendations. We are also very interested in your plans to implement these recommendations and the proposed timeline. We want to reiterate the urgent need to distribute these funds quickly to bolster our recovery. In addition to the ERC Chairs, we would like to invite a representative from your Administration to determine how we can best facilitate this distribution. On behalf of the people of Maine, let's continue our work together and agree on a plan for moving forward with the allocation of these funds as soon as possible.

We look forward to your response and for the opportunity to continue to work with you to meet the challenges facing Maine people.

Sincerely,

Senator Cathy Breen
Senate Chair
Joint Standing Committee on
Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Representative Drew Gattine
House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on
Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Senator Linda Sanborn
Joint Standing Committee on
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Representative Brian Hubbell
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Representative Michelle Dunphy
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Representative John Martin
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Representative Erik Jorgensen
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Representative Teresa Pierce
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