



August 3, 2020

The Honorable Joni Ernst
730 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Ernst,

We, Catholic Sisters living and working in Iowa, have seen and felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has created both an economic and a public health crisis, and its effects have hit the Iowans with the least economic security hardest. We are asking you to recognize the dignity of all Iowans and their right to health care, shelter, and food by supporting increased Medicaid funding to the states and extending the supplemental Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (PUC) to help millions of Iowa families get through this crisis.

Medicaid serves hundreds of thousands of vulnerable Iowans, and must be bolstered during this challenging time for our nation and for Iowa. Additionally, as we see the disparate effect of COVID-19 on people of color and as the pandemic brings other health disparities into sharper focus, Medicaid is an essential program for addressing health inequities.

The Medicaid program in Iowa has been a critical piece of our nation's response the life and death danger of COVID-19. Increased Medicaid funding is a step in the right direction to reduce unjust health disparities in our state. As you can see, Medicaid is THE healthcare system for millions of Iowans:

- More than 682,000 rely on Medicaid in Iowa
- More than 331,000 children rely on Medicaid
- 48 percent of seniors living in nursing homes rely on Medicaid
- 1 in 3 Iowans with disabilities rely on Medicaid

The COVID pandemic has created three points of pressure on Iowa's Medicaid program: increased utilization, increased enrollment and decreased state revenues. So, we ask you to support an increase in federal funding to Medicaid in the next COVID-19 relief legislation to protect this critical program.

It's clear as this pandemic continues, that communities of color in Iowa and across the nation are being hardest hit both by COVID-19 infection and financially. As of July 6, Black people accounted for 5% of COVID-19 deaths in Iowa, despite making up only 3% of the state's population. Hispanic Iowans made up 7% of COVID-19 deaths, despite being 6% of the population. This disparity is sinful; we must address these racial disparities in legislation.

Our nation is currently experiencing the highest unemployment rates since the Great Depression, and it will take a long time for the economy and businesses to recover. Right now, unemployment payments are not only providing financial support to Iowa workers who would otherwise be without income, they are also key to successfully combatting COVID-19.

Without the PUC crisis supplement, critical support will be cut off from an estimated 160,047 struggling workers in Iowa. Without an extension, Iowa could lose a potential GDP increase of 3.4% just when the boost to the economy is needed, resulting in an estimated 42,580 jobs lost from Iowa's economy over the next year. It is unjust and immoral for Iowa families to lose their only source of income right now, and will lead to untold suffering. The \$600 PUC supplement is helping to sustain our state's families and our state's economy, and we ask you to support extending it beyond the initial deadline in the CARES Act.

We appreciate your previous support for Medicaid and other programs supporting families during this pandemic. But there's more work to be done when it comes to dealing with this crisis and its long-term impact. Please support policies and funding that support the life and dignity of all Iowans in the next COVID-19 relief legislation.

Sincerely,

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