

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

March 30, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar,

Rural hospitals are the backbone of communities across our nation. These providers are on the frontlines combating the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. It is imperative these health care professionals receive the immediate support they need to continue caring for our communities.

Small and rural hospitals across the nation are facing an acute financial crisis. Even before this crisis, nearly one-half of rural hospitals were operating at a financial loss, and hundreds were on the brink of closure. Now, they are confronting impossible choices during this public health emergency. The administration must focus on ensuring the financial viability of these providers. Failure to take fast and aggressive action will put the health of our communities at further risk.

In response to this crisis, Congress has enacted a series of bipartisan laws to rescue our economy and health care system. Most recently, we passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). This legislation includes new funding to provide financial relief for hospitals. The CARES Act provides you with the flexibility to deliver assistance where it is needed most. Right now, some rural hospitals are reporting they are running out of operating funds. This jeopardizes their ability to maintain health care services during the COVID-19 outbreak. We cannot afford to ignore their pressing needs.

The vast majority of rural hospitals have also ceased performing elective procedures and seeing non-urgent patients. They know the COVID-19 emergency confronting our country must take precedence. However, these actions threaten their financial viability. We are hearing from rural hospitals from across the country that have only days left of cash-on-hand – money needed for payroll and supplies.

Mr. Secretary, our rural providers need your immediate assistance. Congress has provided you with the funding and flexibility. Now it is up to the administration to respond with rapid action to sustain rural providers. Any unnecessary delay will only worsen this situation.

Therefore, we request you make the financial relief of rural hospitals a priority. Rural hospitals need access to financial resources immediately and in the most streamlined manner. We also request you provide Members of Congress with a personal briefing by teleconference by April 3, 2020.

Thank you for your attention to ensuring the health and well-being of patients in rural America. We welcome the opportunity to discuss your efforts addressing our concerns.

Sincerely,

John Barrasso, M.D.
United States Senator

David P. Roe, M.D.
Member of Congress

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress