

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 4, 2020

Dear Leaders McConnell and Schumer:

Thanks to funding provided through the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-123), and the Coronavirus, Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (P.L. 116-136), research supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) continues to enhance our understanding of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and yield improved tools and approaches for COVID-19 diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. Unfortunately, funding remains insufficient, leaving many key COVID-19 research priorities unfunded and unaddressed. We write to you today to respectfully request that the next stimulus package include robust funding for NIH, specifically for three institutes that have not yet received direct COVID-19 supplemental research funding: the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), and the National Institute for Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD).

In the context of robust funding, a minimum of \$50 million to each of these three Institutes (\$150 million total) would provide support for an estimated 30-45 research groups for a period of five years. Research findings stemming from these investments would allow for deeper exploration of child health and development among those infected by the virus, social and emotional well-being as related to the pandemic including among those infected and uninfected by the virus, approaches to mitigate existing and expanding health disparities, and more. For example, additional funding would provide opportunities for scientists like Dr. Dani Dumitriu, MD, PhD of Columbia University to conduct key research that has thus far been stymied, including expansion of her team's longitudinal cohort study, which follows health and neurodevelopmental outcomes over the short-, medium-, and long-term of newborns and their mothers, either or both of whom were infected with COVID-19 in the perinatal period.

As Dr. Dumitriu so passionately states, "Over 1 million babies have already been born in the United States alone since the start of the pandemic. Another 2 million are currently being exposed during the pre-natal period to either maternal stress, maternal COVID-19 infection, or both. Newborns are some of our most vulnerable citizens and they constitute the future of our country - our future doctors, nurses, politicians, lawyers, blue color workers, inventors.... Yet we currently have zero idea of the impact this pandemic will have on their neurodevelopmental trajectory, on their ability to be fully functional members of society, and their ability to change the course of history by finding ways to prevent another catastrophe of this magnitude."

Discussions with NIMH officials have illustrated that without additional funding, our country's preeminent research body on mental health is simply "scraping together" resources to track the effects of the pandemic on children, to understand the impact of the pandemic on mental health needs, to disentangle the disproportionate and interactive effects of stress and higher infection rates on minorities, and more. Clearly, additional investments in NIH are necessary and of paramount importance.

As you negotiate the next stimulus package, we urge you to provide additional support for growing our COVID-19 knowledge, understanding, and tools to effectively respond by providing robust funding to NICHD, NIMH, and NIMHD. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand

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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen

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Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

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Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator