

Washington, DC Deserves Pandemic Relief Funding Equal to States

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, signed into law on March 27, 2020, treated Washington, DC differently than virtually all other federal legislation by funding it comparably to U.S. territories rather than states—which meant it lost some \$750 million in essential financial support (the District of Columbia was allocated about \$500 million compared to \$1.25 billion for states). This break with Congressional precedent should matter to everyone. As representatives of philanthropic, business and nonprofit organizations in the Greater Washington region (DC, Suburban Maryland, and Virginia), we are adamant that it is both fair and appropriate that future COVID-19 legislation maintain decades of past practice by funding DC comparably to states.

DC's population of 705,000 is higher than some states. Its residents pay the highest per-capita federal income taxes in the country and together pay more taxes than 22 states. A U.S. Senate report notes, "Congress already treats the District as if it were a state for the purpose of over 500 statutory purposes — from federal taxation to military conscription to highway funds, education funds, and national motor voter requirements. The Supreme Court has also deemed DC the equivalent of a state for certain constitutional purposes..."

DC residents support and protect the home of the nation's treasures — from the Smithsonian Institution to the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, from the National Archives to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum — and the institutions of the federal government itself. They ensure that vital federal functions continue to operate. Many are essential employees who put themselves at risk by commuting and showing up at work every day to keep the government and essential services going.

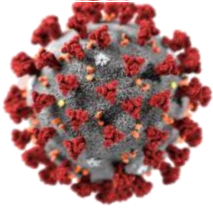
The District is also home to vast economic and racial inequities, with a population at high risk. There are almost 3,000 diagnosed cases of COVID-19 in DC, more than in 20 states, and over 26,000 cases across DC, MD, and VA. Nearly half of DC's residents are African-American, many of whom experience the risk factors that may contribute to the much higher rate of illness and death from COVID-19 than for white Americans — being required to leave their home to work, commuting on public transportation, living in crowded (or no) housing, and having pre-existing conditions and uneven access to medical care (including no hospital in the lowest-income area of the city). The District also has more than 76,000 small businesses with 247,000 employees, and more than 12,000 nonprofits with more than 118,000 employees, whose livelihoods are threatened. For these reasons, the District needs and deserves the extra stimulus funding that comes with including it among the states.

Some of us live or work in Washington, DC, while others are based in Maryland or Virginia. This virus knows no borders. We all recognize the valuable role DC plays in our nation, and we join with other leaders around the region to insist that any future stimulus funding give Washington, DC the full and equitable funding it deserves.

Sincerely,

Dr. Madye Henson, President and CEO

Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers (WRAG)



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