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Graham Knaus

January 29, 2021

RE: FEDERAL COVID-19 RELIEF

Dear Members of the California Congressional Delegation:

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to claim lives, fill hospital emergency rooms, and wreak economic havoc across local communities, I urge you to seek additional federal financial support for California's counties. Specifically, I urge you to seek inclusion of robust, direct and flexible federal fiscal aid for county governments of all sizes and to prioritize funding for local public health and critical safety-net programs as part of any forthcoming COVID-19 relief bill.

As you know, counties remain on the frontlines of responding to the ongoing public health crisis. While coronavirus caseloads and hospitalizations are finally trending downward after the deadly post-holiday surge, California continues to be among the states with the highest per-capita infection rates and fatalities. Faced with tens of thousands of new coronavirus cases daily, local public health departments have been tasked with ramping up contact tracing and disease investigation, testing, and now vaccination efforts. Although state and federal dollars have supplemented these efforts, local health departments require additional funding to effectively fight COVID-19 in the months ahead.

In addition to meeting unprecedented demands in the area of public health, counties also are responding to an increased need for other essential public services that many Californians depend upon, including those that are geared to our state's most vulnerable populations. For example, local jurisdictions have had to direct additional resources to Project Roomkey, which has been instrumental in housing individuals at risk or experiencing homelessness and who are recovering, exposed to, or at high risk for medical complications due to COVID-19. Counties also are seeing huge spikes in the demand for nutrition assistance. During the last week of December 2020, there were over 74,000 new applications for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/CalFresh), reflecting a 131 percent increase from the same week in 2019.

While previously approved federal COVID-19-related financial support and emergency program funding has helped counties in their response to the pandemic, increased federal assistance will be necessary as public health and other program costs continue to rise and as key local revenue sources remain severely constrained due to the ongoing economic downturn. Further, with enhanced unemployment benefits slated to end in mid-March, this will create tremendous additional strain on county budgets as more individuals turn to the services and assistance that counties

provide, such as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF/CalWORKs). With full-scale vaccinations still months away, counties of all sizes must receive additional direct federal assistance to meet ongoing and future demands for public health, emergency response, and other vital public services.

Thank you, as always, for your support and partnership throughout this incredibly challenging time. CSAC looks forward to continuing to work with you and your staff as the 117th Congress considers legislative options for addressing the ongoing public health and economic crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'GKnaus', is positioned above the typed name.

Graham Knaus
Executive Director