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January 25, 2022

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer,

Following President Biden's remarks indicating a desire for Congress to approve some provisions of Build Back Better, I am writing to urgently request that the Senate include two priorities in the revised Build Back Better package that are crucial for state and territorial health officials throughout the country. They are a mandatory public health infrastructure fund to provide sustained, flexible, and long-term funding for public health departments and a permanent fix for Medicaid funding for the U.S. Territories. These provisions (Sec. 31001 and Sec. 30731) are included in the House-passed Build Back Better Act (H.R. 5376).

While fighting to bring the COVID-19 pandemic under control is the number one priority, public health professionals across the country must simultaneously prepare for the next outbreak or public health threat. A public health infrastructure fund at all levels of the governmental public health enterprise will fill long-standing gaps, enable the modernization of archaic technologies and systems, and build a foundation for a more effective, efficient public health response to future pandemics. Prescriptive budgets and designations for a particular disease or health condition can hinder public health agencies' ability to address the wide range of health needs. Public health agencies are grateful when they can invest flexible funds in their communities while also providing proper oversight and stewardship. ASTHO is gravely concerned that without long-term predictable and flexible funding, we will be unable to modernize our public health system for the future and respond adequately to emerging disease threats.

Additionally, ASTHO members strongly support the House-passed provision that provides a permanent fix to the Medicaid allotment to the U.S. territories and an adjustment to the federal medical assistance percentage. COVID-19 has stretched healthcare systems to their limits across the country, and reliable funding for patient care is essential to maintain this capacity. Due to their geographic isolation, the U.S. territories face unique challenges and often transport patients off-island for certain specialty services, which might be uncompensated for the hosting jurisdiction. A permanent fix for Medicaid will help expand the capacity of local hospitals and health systems. Without Congressional action, the territories will face a funding cliff, dramatically impacting the health and wellbeing of their populations.

We kindly request a meeting with your staff to discuss these provisions and their impact on the governmental public health system. Please contact Carolyn McCoy, senior director of government affairs, at cmccoy@astho.org.

Sincerely,



Michael Fraser, PhD, MS, CAE, FCPP
Chief Executive Officer
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials

cc: The Honorable Joe Manchin III
The Honorable Kyrsten Sinema