

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 11, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As our country continues to confront the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we must continue to support the needs of our nation's seniors – one of the most vulnerable populations to this virus outbreak. It is for this reason that we respectfully request that you include the bipartisan *Advancing Connectivity during the Coronavirus to Ensure Support for Seniors (ACCESS) Act* (S. 3517) in the next coronavirus response package.

As you know, older adults are among the most vulnerable populations during disease outbreaks, and recent data has shown that the senior population is especially susceptible to the worst effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. People over the age of 60 are at the highest risk for severe disease and death from COVID-19, and it has been estimated that eight out of 10 COVID-19 deaths have been adults ages 65 years and older.¹ Reports have also indicated that the pandemic is particularly deadly for those in nursing homes. Over 10,000 nursing home residents and facility staff have died across the 23 states that have reported coronavirus fatality data, representing over 25 percent of coronavirus deaths in those states.²

In an effort to protect seniors from COVID-19 and contain the spread of the virus, nursing homes across the country have instituted no-visitors policies. While this is an important and necessary step to help keep residents safe from the virus, these policies have unfortunately cut seniors off from their families and health care providers – leaving them isolated from their loved ones and struggling to access care without risking exposure. It is clear that we must offer flexible solutions for seniors during this dangerous and difficult time, including by providing new ways for nursing home residents to connect with their families.

The ACCESS Act provides \$50 million in emergency funding for the Department of Health and Human Services' Telehealth Resource Centers to help nursing homes that receive Medicare or

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/older-adults.html>

² <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/state-reporting-of-cases-and-deaths-due-to-covid-19-in-long-term-care-facilities/>

Medicaid funding expand their use of telehealth services. The legislation also creates a grant program to provide funding to nursing homes to obtain and use technologies and services needed to support virtual visits – helping seniors stay connected with their loved ones and families to ensure nursing home residents are being well cared for. Our legislation also requires that the Administration report to Congress on recommendations for other ways to improve access to telehealth services in nursing facilities and alternative sites for nursing home residents during the coronavirus pandemic.

We encourage you to include the ACCESS Act in the next coronavirus relief package to help seniors remain connected to their families and health care providers during this public health crisis. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

/S/ Amy Klobuchar
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/S/ Robert. P Casey, Jr.
Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

/S/ Shelley Moore Capito
Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator