

Missoula County Commissioners

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BCC 2021-022
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Dear Sen. Daines,

As Congress begins to consider additional federal aid to help America address the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to find ways to include direct support for local governments in these negotiations.

The CARES Act included direct aid to counties, but only those with populations of 500,000 or more, leaving out all localities in Montana. Local governments have been on the frontlines of addressing the pandemic in their communities from Day 1, and counties large and small are feeling the strain during this prolonged response effort. Direct federal aid will be the most helpful and efficient way to ensure this response remains strong, as it will allow our teams to respond more nimbly to the specific, current needs of our communities.

In addition to the tireless work of our public health officials over the last 10 months, local response efforts in Missoula County now include those of the Vaccine Coordination Team, which is working to ensure we are doing everything we can to identify and address barriers to administering the vaccine to all residents who wish to receive it and to reduce public anxiety by providing timely, accurate information. The team will work diligently to accomplish this until the vaccine is widely available. This work will require additional time and resources, the cost of which will ultimately fall to local property-tax payers if no federal reimbursement is made available.

As we ramp up these efforts, it's encouraging to see that President Biden's Rescue America Plan would provide \$20 billion to state, local and tribal governments and territories to launch community vaccination centers around the country and deploy mobile vaccination units to remote areas. This would complement the efforts of our vaccine providers locally and help more of our residents get vaccinated quickly and safely, ensuring we can get more people back to work, school and normal life.

We also support the proposals to provide direct aid to local government entities to fund initiatives that support economic development and job-creation; aid for localities to protect residents in county-owned congregate settings like jails and long-term care facilities; and emergency assistance for local jurisdiction to help individuals and families obtain stable housing, provide flexibility for both congregate and non-congregate housing options, and help jurisdictions purchase and convert hotels and motels into permanent housing.

We urge you to support these proposals, as well as any others that provide direct aid to local governments, so we and other local jurisdictions in Montana have the best means possible to serve our residents as we enter what is hopefully the last stretch of the pandemic. If you have any questions or need further information from us, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

David Strohmaier, Chair

Josh Slotnick, Commissioner

Juanita Vero, Commissioner

BCC/ac