



# CITY OF HOUSTON

**Sylvester Turner**

Mayor

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The Honorable John Cornyn  
517 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ted Cruz  
404 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cornyn and Senator Cruz:

First, I wanted to thank you for your support for the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (“CARES Act”) that has immeasurably helped our community deal with the enormous impact of the coronavirus on Houston. Having seen many provisions of the CARES Act expire on Friday, July 31<sup>st</sup>, I am requesting that you work with your colleagues to immediately pass coronavirus stimulus legislation.

Extending the unemployment insurance supplement is vital in supporting the record number of Americans who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own, but it is also proving just as important to our economy.

- According to a July 2020 JP Morgan Chase & Company Institute report, “Although average spending fell for all households as the economy shut down at the start of the pandemic, we find in a new insight that unemployed households actually increased their spending beyond pre-unemployment levels once they began receiving benefits. This suggests that the \$600 supplement has helped households smooth consumption and stabilized aggregate demand.”

The supplement is insuring stability for Americans who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic as well as providing stimulus to our local economy.

Stability for millions of workers is also dependent on rental and mortgage relief. Here in Houston, we are set to dedicate an additional \$15 million in federal CARES Act dollars toward rental assistance along with an additional \$4 million in private philanthropy (targeted for those ineligible for CARES funding) for a total of \$34 million.

I continue to urge you to adopt proposals from the House Financial Services Committee and dedicate \$100 billion to an Emergency Rental Assistance Fund and \$75 billion to a Homeowner Assistance Fund to avert a looming wave of evictions and foreclosures along with an extension of the eviction and foreclosure moratorium to all renters and borrowers and mortgage forbearance available to all homeowners.

We are trying to maximize our limited resources, however the need, with historic unemployment, is great. More must be done to keep our most vulnerable citizens from losing their housing through no fault of their own.

Support for State and Local Government is also critical given how sales taxes receipts have affected our budgets.

- Recently, Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar reported that the Texas state government will bring in \$11.6 billion less during the current two-year budget than the comptroller forecast last year, ending with a shortfall of \$4.6 billion.

As a former senior state budget official, I can personally testify that the consequences of this shortfall will have significant impact on the critical services provided by the state.

Governments that depend on sales tax dollars are going to be unable to provide services, just when the need for those services is spiking. Local health departments along with first responders are critical in combating this virus. The backbone of service infrastructure, such as solid waste collection along with water and sewer service, are needed in order to provide businesses with operational certainty.

Finally, support is needed for testing and contract tracing. At every press conference I give, I announce the number of new cases along with the number of reported deaths. This virus is targeting the vulnerable, and that is especially true for communities of color. Reading the ages and races of those who we have lost, Hispanic and African Americans make up a disproportionate number of deaths and we are working to target efforts to these communities.

The City of Houston now has over 300 contact tracers, funded by CARES Act dollars you wisely approved, that are following up with positive cases in our community. This medical practice is one of the most effective tactics to control the spread of the virus without a vaccine. Their effective capacity is between 200 and 300 new cases a day.

This weekend, we reported the following new case numbers for the City of Houston:

Sunday, August 2 <sup>nd</sup>	1,367
Saturday, August 1 <sup>st</sup>	1,456
Friday, July 31 <sup>st</sup>	1,554

Simply put, we will not be effective in our efforts to combat this virus with these numbers.

The Rockefeller Foundation is requesting at least \$75 billion be made available for testing, tracing, and treatment we need to help ensure that every American can access free coronavirus treatment. To quote Dr. Rajiv J. Shah, President of The Rockefeller Foundation:

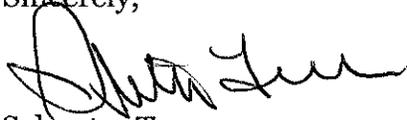
*“America faces an impending disaster. We need to scale the nationwide screening test strategy to keep essential institutions and parts of the economy open and functional until there is a vaccine or a more effective treatment. This includes massively increasing availability of fast, inexpensive screening tests to identify asymptomatic Americans who carry the virus. Today, we are conducting too few of these types of tests.”*

As the number of new cases remain high, our local efforts are simply overwhelmed and will not be effective unless significantly supplemented with new resources and tactics.

With city programing virtual eliminated, my office is focused on programs to battle food insecurity, eviction mediation services, and testing accessibility and timelines. Uncertainty around school programs are leaving parents understandably nervous and exhausted. All of this is happening while we are experiencing depression era levels of unemployment.

Our federal partners must come together to provide resources to help in this battle. Time is not on our side.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sylvester Turner', written in a cursive style.

Sylvester Turner

Mayor