



United States Senate or House of Representatives

Hello Senator/Representative:

The NYS Association for Rural Health's mission is to improve the health and well-being of rural New Yorkers and their communities. NYSARH membership includes representatives of all facets of the rural health care industry, as well as individuals and students. NYSARH serves individuals, consumers, non-profit organizations, government agencies and officials, health care facilities, emergency medical service providers, long-term care organizations, businesses, universities, foundations, associations, and other stakeholders in rural health. We serve as the 'voice for rural health'.

NYSARH has identified four priorities for Congressional action during the current session.

1. Coronavirus Relief for State and Local Governments

The New York State Division of the Budget has released the FY 2021 First Quarterly State Budget Financial Plan Update, which projects a \$14.5 billion General Fund revenue decline and a 15.3% All Funds tax receipts decline from the Budget forecast released in February, creating a total loss of \$62 billion through FY 2024 as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The \$14.5 billion projected revenue decline for FY 2021 represents a \$1.2 billion decline from revenue estimates made in April in the Enacted Budget Financial Plan. The Financial plan shows the State reduced spending through June by nearly \$4 billion compared to FY 2020 spending over the same period. The State has done this by freezing hiring, new contracts and pay raises, and holding back 20% of payments.

As the nation begins phased reopening, public health agencies, schools and local governments are strained, not only for staffing and resources but also funding to help support continued service delivery to the community. A revenue shortfall of this magnitude will devastate schools across New York State, in addition the healthcare, social service and public health sectors. As a state, and as a nation, we need your steadfast support now more than ever.

2. Extend Census data collection period

With roughly four out of ten households nationwide yet to be counted, and already delayed by the coronavirus pandemic, the Census Bureau now has less than two months left to try to reach people of color, immigrants, renters, rural residents and other members of historically undercounted groups who are not likely to fill out a census form on their own.

These last-minute changes to the constitutionally mandated count of every person living in the U.S. threaten the accuracy of population numbers used to determine the distribution of political representation and federal funding for the next decade. It is important for Congress to step in to ensure that the Department of Commerce fully complete the census count.

3. Support the U.S. Postal Service

Rural Post Offices are important communication hubs in small towns and hamlets. Many rural residents depend on the mail for delivery of medications and home care supplies. The U.S. Postal Service has long been an important source of decent jobs in far-flung communities. In the current crisis, postal workers are playing a particularly vital role in our nation's economic and public health as they strain to meet the surge in demand for package deliveries. The USPS is poised to play a critical role in ensuring the health of our democracy as it handles increased volumes of vote by mail ballots.

4. Save Rural Hospitals

The National Rural Health Association's number one priority, and one of the best ways we think we can save rural facilities, is for Congress to include the Rural Hospital Closure Relief Act in the Coronavirus package currently under consideration. Not only do we think this legislation will be beneficial nationwide, it will be particularly positive in New York. This legislation simply provides flexibility to the 35-mile distance requirement for Critical Access Hospitals.

Sincerely,

Sara Wall Bollinger
NYS Rural Health Association