



March 21, 2020

The Honorable Ben Cardin
509 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Trone
1213 Longworth House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
110 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Joyce
1337 Longworth Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pat Toomey
United States Senate
248 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David McKinley
2239 Rayburn House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bob Casey
393 Russell Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
172 Russell Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Joe Manchin
306 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators and Congressmen,

On behalf of the I-68 Regional Alliance, a coalition of economic development organizations from across the five-county, tri-state region, including Allegany and Garrett Counties in Maryland, Mineral County in West Virginia and Somerset and Bedford Counties in Pennsylvania, representing a Region of thousands of small businesses that employ tens of

thousands of employees in a multitude of industries, we write to ask you to consider improvements to the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) passed on March 18, 2020. Our suggested improvement will ensure our workers have access to paid leave in the face of this public health crisis while also providing relief to businesses and important incentives to sustain access to employer-provided health benefits, on which many of our workers rely.

We appreciate Congress and the Administration moving quickly to mitigate the threats COVID-19 poses to public health, our economy, and workers across our Region and we urge Congress to replace the paid leave mandates with a federal emergency program. The provisions of this law, which require businesses with 500 **and fewer** employees to provide up to 80 hours of paid sick leave and up to 12 weeks of paid family leave, presume liquidity and a tolerance for debt that simply does not exist at this time, particularly in our rural Appalachian communities. We fear that these mandates will accelerate small and medium business closures, and we already know that some of our smaller businesses have laid off workers due to their concerns about the implementation of this law. If corrective measures are not taken immediately, we anticipate many more employers, particularly the smallest and most vulnerable of our businesses, those that create vibrancy and a sense of community, like cafes, restaurants and other small retailers, will close in the immediate future, perhaps never to reopen. Although the FFCRA includes tax credits and Treasury Secretary Mnuchin has promised to advance business money, **credits will not produce sufficient liquidity in time**. We fear the government does not have the infrastructure and businesses do not have the administrative resources to access these advances in the time needed to deter business closures. Thus, we believe a federally administered program is needed to provide critical income to workers and liquidity to businesses which will help our economy weather this storm by encouraging businesses to keep employees “on the books.” This will help ensure continuation of employer provided benefits, especially health care benefits which are absolutely critical for our workers, particularly in this health crisis.

On behalf of our business community, we urge you to consider this change to the FFCRA and thank you for moving swiftly and decisively to help our workers, their families, and the businesses that employ them. We stand ready to work with you at this critical moment.

With kind regards,

Jennifer M. Walsh, Esquire

Executive Director

Alliance Partners:

- TGCC
- JARI, Pennsylvania
- Somerset County Chamber of Commerce, Pennsylvania
- Somerset County Economic Development Council, Pennsylvania

- Bedford County Chamber of Commerce, Pennsylvania
- Bedford County Development Association, Pennsylvania
- Bedford County Planning Commission, Pennsylvania
- Mineral County Development Authority, West Virginia
- Mineral County Chamber of Commerce, West Virginia
- Mineral County Convention & Visitors Bureau, West Virginia
- Cumberland Economic Development Corp, Maryland
- City of Frostburg, Maryland
- Allegany County Chamber of Commerce, Maryland
- Garrett County Chamber of Commerce, Maryland
- Garrett County Economic Development, Maryland
- Greater Grantsville Business Association, Maryland