



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

MAYOR BEN WALSH

May 8, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United State House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McConnell,

I write to you with an understanding of the unprecedented challenge you face in making federal support available to the many millions of Americans in need of relief from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also write with confidence that providing assistance to the City of Syracuse will be a wise investment in the recovery of our nation.

Syracuse is a city of nearly 143,000 people located in the heart of New York State. While we suffered decades of decline in the latter part of the 20th century, Syracuse's fortunes have begun to change in recent years. I am proud to say that Syracuse was the only big city in New York State to achieve population growth in the most recent census projection. We are New York State's Flagship Smart City and under a strategy we call, "The Syracuse Surge," we're making major investments in technology, education, and workforce development to position our residents to succeed in the Fourth Industrial revolution. Microsoft, Verizon Wireless and JP Morgan Chase Bank are major corporations investing in Syracuse and our forward-thinking plan.

Despite the challenges in our past, Syracuse is now on a path toward fiscal sustainability. We have a modest fund balance that represents about 20% of our budget. Heading into March, we were on pace to end the current fiscal year with a small surplus.

The measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 have dealt our city a severe blow. Against an annual city budget of approximately \$250 million, we estimate a loss in revenue of tens of millions of dollars in the next 14 months. We have also been advised to plan for at least a 20% cut in state aid. These reductions are before calculating millions more in higher expenses and in lost local fees and income from reduced economic activity.

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Last week, I was forced to put more than 100 city workers on temporary leave without pay to achieve immediate cost reductions. In addition, since our charter requires that we achieve a balanced budget, we will be forced to make a major draw from our reserve for this fiscal year. Earlier this week, our Common Council approved a budget for the next fiscal year that relies on the sale of city real estate assets and a cut in funding to our police department to hold off an even more precarious reliance on our reserves.

Regrettably, these actions will not be enough to prevent service and staff reductions that will negatively impact city residents and essential local government workers. It is only through direct aid from the federal government to cover expenses and offset lost revenue due to COVID -19 that Syracuse can avoid such harmful actions.

Local governments like the City of Syracuse provide the foundations for communities and regions, and with strong foundations we can build back our economy. Syracuse is a community that can provide such a solid base to local small businesses, non-profits and large employers to begin growing again. With support from the federal government, Syracuse will be able to resume its positive trajectory and help our nation recover more quickly from COVID-19.

With urgency and respect, I ask for timely action on federal relief to state and local governments.

Sincerely,



Ben Walsh
Mayor

Cc: Hon. Charles Schumer, U.S. Senate, Minority Leader
Hon. Kirsten Gillibrand, U.S. Senate
Hon. Kevin McCarthy, U.S. House of Representatives, Minority Leader
Hon. John Katko, U.S House of Representatives
Hon. Helen Hudson, Syracuse Common Council, President
Hon. J. Ryan McMahan, II, Onondaga County Executive