THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

March 13, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20032

The Honorable Steven T. Mnuchin
Secretary
Department of Treasury
Washington, D.C. 20220

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Pete T. Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Secretary Wolf, Secretary Mnuchin, Secretary Azar, and Administrator Gaynor:

I have determined that the ongoing Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant an emergency determination under section 501(b) of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. 5121-5207 (the "Stafford Act").

My decision to make this determination pursuant to section 501(b) of the Stafford Act is based on the fact that our entire country is now facing a significant public health emergency. The World Health Organization has officially declared that we are in the midst of a global pandemic. As of the date of this declaration, 32 states, 3 territories, 4 tribes, and 1 tribal nation, spread geographically across our country, have declared a state of emergency as a result of the virus. Only the Federal Government can provide the necessary coordination to address a pandemic of this national size and scope caused by a pathogen introduced into our country. It is the preeminent responsibility of the Federal Government to take action to stem a nationwide pandemic that has its origins abroad, which implicates its authority to regulate matters related to interstate matters and foreign commerce and to conduct the foreign relations of the United States. For example, the Federal Government, through the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and its component, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has authority

to take the necessary steps "to prevent the introduction, transmission, or spread of communicable diseases from foreign countries into the States or possessions, or from one State or possession into any other State or possession," 42 U.S.C. § 264(a), in close coordination with State, local, and tribal officials. In addition, the Federal Government has responsibility for securing our borders and overseeing entry of foreign nationals into our country in the interest of the United States.

This pandemic has the potential to cause severe consequences for our country's national and economic security. Based on the advice of public health officials, I have already taken stringent measures to restrict travel to the United States of foreign nationals who have been recently physically present in certain countries that pose a threat of intensifying the spread of COVID-19 within our country. And HHS and CDC have taken effective action to address the public health threat posed by COVID-19. While these actions have been in the best interest of the health of our people, COVID-19 has the potential to impose a temporary financial hardship on all Americans. It is therefore critical that we deploy all powers and authorities available to the Federal Government to provide needed relief.

Therefore, as an initial step, I hereby determine, under section 501(b) of the Stafford Act, that an emergency exists nationwide.

In accordance with this determination, the Federal Emergency Management Agency may provide, as appropriate, assistance pursuant to section 502 and 503 of the Stafford Act for emergency protective measures not authorized under other Federal statutes. Administrator Gaynor shall coordinate and direct other Federal agencies in providing needed assistance under the Stafford Act, subject to the Department of Health and Human Services' role as the lead Federal agency for the Federal Government's response to COVID-19.

In order to meet the challenges caused by this emergency pandemic, I have encouraged all State and local governments to activate their Emergency Operations Centers and to review their emergency preparedness plans. In the meantime, I expect FEMA to continue to review all ways in which it can provide assistance to States consistent with the authorities provided to it by this letter and by statute.

I am also instructing Secretary Mnuchin to provide relief from tax deadlines to Americans who have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 emergency, as appropriate, pursuant to 26 U.S.C. 7508A(a).

In addition, after careful consideration, I believe that the disaster is of such severity and magnitude nationwide that requests for a declaration of a major disaster as set forth in section 401(a) of the Stafford Act may be appropriate.

I encourage all governors and tribal leaders to consider requesting Federal assistance under this provision of the Stafford Act, pursuant to the statutory criteria. I stand ready to expeditiously consider any such request.

Sincerely,

