

January [], 2019

[To:]
Washington, DC [Zip code]

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Dear []:

With the partial government shutdown nearing the four-week point, the undersigned organizations call on Congress and the President to immediately reopen the government to minimize any further impact on the public’s health and wellbeing. Several agencies’ ability to provide critical services, ranging from food and environmental risk inspections to health services, have already been drastically reduced or are threatened if the shutdown continues. We fear a prolonged shutdown will cause needless suffering and have long-lasting health consequences.

Basic health protections could be endangered by an ongoing shutdown. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is suspending its routine food inspections except at “high-risk facilities,” and its ability to enforce food safety rules may be sharply impaired as 40 percent of its workforce is furloughed. The FDA oversees 80 percent of the food supply, and regular inspections and enforcement help stop foodborne illness before people get sick. The FDA also will not be able to assess new drug and device applications if the shutdown continues, meaning life-saving innovations will take longer to come to market.

There are also increased environmental risks to the health of the public. The Environmental Protection Agency has suspended its inspections of chemical factories, power plants and water treatment operations while the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is no longer investigating and assessing environmental health threats.

The shutdown is having cascading impacts on the public’s health through loss of income and potential cuts to programs that families rely on for health and economic stability. Access to nutrition and food assistance, breastfeeding support and infant nutrition through U.S. Department of Agriculture programs is critical to maintaining health and performance in school and work. Programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) are at serious risk of benefit cuts if the shutdown continues. And 800,000 Americans are furloughed or working without paychecks, which puts their ability to pay rent and utilities, access medicines, and put food on the table in jeopardy. Residents simply cannot maintain their health without stable housing, food and medical care.

Indian Country has been disproportionately impacted by the shutdown, which is curtailing health care and programs for American Indian communities. The Indian Health Service (IHS) receives its funding through the Department of the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, so tribal governments are cutting other services and scraping together scarce dollars to keep health clinics operational in the short term. Many IHS employees working without pay are already reportedly looking for other jobs, which would be a huge blow to an

agency that has great difficulty recruiting and retaining medical professionals in rural and remote areas. The shutdown is destabilizing Native health delivery and health care provider access, as well as destabilizing tribal governments, families, children and individuals. Services will be cut, and serious consequences to health and safety will be the result if the shutdown is not ended soon.

A prolonged shutdown will continue to put the health and safety of the nation's residents at risk. It is vital that Congress and the President work to reopen the government as soon as possible to minimize the effects of the impasse.

Sincerely,

DRAFT