

Ben Ray Luján pushes for aid for local governments

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Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M., U. S. House assistant speaker Ben Ray Luján, D-N.M., introduced the Coronavirus Community Relief Act. He was joined by Congressmembers Joe Neguse, D-Colo., Andy Levin, D-Mich., and Tom Malinowski, D-N.J., in support of providing \$250 billion in stabilization funds for local communities, towns, and cities across the United States that need relief amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

The *Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act*, signed into law on March 27, provided stabilization funds for states and larger communities, but capped the localities able to receive direct support at those with populations of over 500,000. This excludes some large metropolitan areas, as well as towns, cities, and rural counties that have been hit hard by the COVID-19 outbreak. Only one county in New Mexico has a population exceeding 500,000, according to the most recent U.S. Census data. Congressman Luján's district includes chiefly rural counties and Tribal nations that have been particularly hard hit by COVID-19, making this legislation critically-needed for local governments in New Mexico to access direct relief.

"New Mexico is experiencing the public health and economic toll of the COVID-19 pandemic. While Congress has worked in a bipartisan fashion to begin to address this crisis, we must do more to support local and state governments that are incurring significant costs responding to this pandemic," Luján said. "This legislation ensures that all communities receive the direct relief they need and I will continue to fight to provide our local communities with the necessary resources needed to overcome this crisis."

On April 2, Luján was joined by Neguse, Levin, and Malinowski and 21 other members of Congress in a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., in requesting help for smaller communities. "We are concerned that, in both the House and Senate bills, localities with populations under 500,000 cannot receive stabilization funds directly. As you work to craft the next package to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to include direct stabilization funding to localities with populations under 500,000, or to lower the threshold for direct funding

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through the Coronavirus Relief Fund. There's precedent for a lower threshold. Currently, localities with populations of at least 50,000 are eligible to receive funding through the Community Development Block Grant program."

"We believe this funding will allow smaller counties, cities and towns in our districts to continue the tremendous work they are doing to protect our constituents during this difficult time," it concluded.

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