

# Congress of the United States

April 13, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-204, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

We write to urge the inclusion of dedicated funding to support cybersecurity for State and local governments in the next package COVID-19 relief package.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has changed every aspect of American life. According to the Brookings Institution, “up to half of American workers are currently working from home.”<sup>1</sup> That includes State and local government employees who may be less accustomed to teleworking and less prepared to do it securely, *making State and local networks more vulnerable to ransomware and other cyber attacks*. At the same time, the cyber risk to State and local networks has increased dramatically due to unprecedented demand for online services, such as unemployment compensation and human services applications

Well before the first COVID-19 diagnosis in the United States, hackers had been wreaking havoc on State and local networks, costing taxpayers millions of dollars. In 2019, ransomware attacks crippled State and local agencies in Louisiana, the City of Baltimore, Maryland, 22 towns in Texas, and many other communities scattered across the country. Cities from Albany to Atlanta have been impacted— to the tune of nearly \$20 million in some cases. In the wake of COVID-19, the National Governors Association has reported a rise in the number of COVID-19-related cyber attacks targeting State and local governments, undermining continuity of operations at a time when government services are needed most.

State and local government employees are working hard to ensure continuity of operations. However, working from home, they are more susceptible to phishing, malware, and ransomware attacks. Many State and local employees are using personal, unvetted devices, so employers have no visibility on endpoints. These devices might be unpatched, rely on an unsupported operating system, or lack strong endpoint protection. Many may not be using a virtual private network

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<sup>1</sup> Katherine Guyot & Isabel V. Sawhill, “Telecommuting Will Likely Continue Long After the Pandemic,” blog, Brookings Institution (Apr. 6, 2020), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/04/06/telecommuting-will-likely-continue-long-after-the-pandemic/>.

(VPN). Additionally, the rapid development and scaling up of potentially vulnerable, unvetted applications to facilitate online services presents new risks. In short, the State and local jurisdictions we are counting on to help implement and deliver the COVID-19 relief packages Congress has passed have less cybersecurity than most Congressional offices.

In February, the Committee on Homeland Security approved and ordered reported H.R. 5823, the *State and Local Government Cybersecurity Improvement Act*, bi-partisan legislation to provide \$400 million in cybersecurity grants to States annually. Among other things, the legislation would allow State and local governments to use funds to address cybersecurity risks deemed imminent by the Director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. Importantly, this assistance is separate and apart from election security assistance.

The American public is counting on State and local jurisdictions to implement and deliver COVID-19 relief packages approved by Congress. Any disruption in the delivery of services would only compound the strain on State and local governments struggling to effectively serve their citizens in the midst of a global pandemic. We cannot let that happen.

As such, we respectfully request that you consider including cybersecurity assistance grants for State and local governments in the next COVID-19 relief package. They are critical partners in our response and recovery, and their ability to deliver services unabated is critical to national resiliency.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



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Bennie G. Thompson  
Chairman  
Committee on Homeland Security



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Cedric L. Richmond  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Infrastructure  
Security, and Innovation  
Committee on Homeland Security



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Derek Kilmer  
Member of Congress

/s/

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C.A. Dutch Ruppertsberger  
Member of Congress

Cc: The Hon. Steny Hoyer, Majority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives  
The Hon. Kevin McCarthy, Republican Leader, U.S. House of Representatives  
The Hon. Nita Lowey, Chairwoman, Committee on Appropriations  
The Hon. Kay Granger, Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations