

United States Senate

August 19, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer,

We write to request that upcoming COVID-19 relief legislation include robust funding for school telehealth programs in order support accessible healthcare services for students across the nation throughout the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. As school districts across the nation prepare for the upcoming school year, it is crucial that Congress prioritize support for school safety and the health of students, staff, and families. Where effective and appropriate, telehealth could provide critical tools to support student wellbeing as it relates to both COVID-19 and other healthcare needs while in coordination with consenting parents or any legal guardians of minor children.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated challenges many students face with regard to accessing essential primary care services. According to September 2019 estimates from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, over 77 million Americans live in a primary care shortage area, including over 1 million Coloradans and over 2.8 million Arizonians. This problem is particularly dire for rural areas of the country. During this current crisis, access to and collaboration with pediatricians is an essential element of the American Academy of Pediatrics June 2019 report: "COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Reentry."

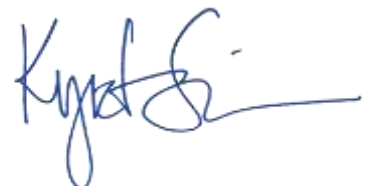
An increase in funding to support telehealth in schools would help schools' ability to support student health. Additional resources would help these programs facilitate the coordination of teachers, school nurses, families, and healthcare providers to ensure that all students are able to receive the medical care they need with the support of their school district, while simultaneously encouraging a whole-child approach to promote students' success in the classroom and their communities at-large. In our home states, a pilot telehealth program launched in the Denver Public Schools in Colorado and Roosevelt School District in Arizona prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and have seen high levels of engagement. These pilot programs also included the capacity to measure effectiveness of the services provided. Other telehealth programs have been piloted through partnerships with community health centers and community mental health centers.

As our country is seeking solutions to address the current crisis on hand, it is critical that we are doing everything we can to ensure that students have access to essential healthcare services regardless of their socioeconomic status or zip code. In order to do this, we urge you to include robust funding for school telehealth programs in the next COVID-19 relief package. Thank you for your attention to this important topic.

Sincerely,



Cory Gardner
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator