



July 24, 2020

To All Members of Congress:

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) represents over 95,000 licensed architects and design professionals across all 50 states. We have seen our profession and our communities challenged by the COVID-19 crisis in ways unlike ever before. We thank Congress for your leadership to provide much needed relief in previous legislation, including the *Coronavirus Preparedness Response Supplemental Appropriations Act*, the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act*, and the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act*.

As America continues to grapple with the COVID-19 crisis, we call on you to pass additional legislation to address ongoing problems. Specifically, the next federal relief package must address building occupant health and safety, provide immediate economic relief, and make long-overdue investment in America's vertical infrastructure.

Building Occupant Health and Safety

First and foremost, AIA is committed to safeguarding the health, safety, and welfare of the public. We urge you to include the following investments in the next relief package to retrofit essential buildings to protect occupants' safety:

- **Provide immediate federal funding to make necessary physical updates to schools, childcare centers, and other essential public buildings so that it is safer for occupants to return**
- **Include the bipartisan H.R. 7079, the *Clean Start: Back to Work Tax Credit Act*, to help business recoup some of the unexpected costs of enhanced cleaning and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**
- **Expand the *Clean Start: Back to Work Tax Credit Act* to cover design services**

The COVID-19 crisis is undoubtedly an epidemiological problem, but as people congregate inside for necessary business, it is also spatial reasoning problem. There are physical changes that may be necessary to allow occupants to gather more safely, including redesigning the layout; replacing building materials; installing touchless entry; improving air ventilation; and other physical changes.

In May, AIA provided the [Re-Occupancy Assessment Tool](#) as a free resource to all Members of Congress, FEMA, and the general public. While there is no one-sized-fits-all retrofit that will guarantee occupant safety, the AIA Re-Occupancy Assessment Tool includes many recommendations on where to start. It includes specific recommendations for certain building types, including schools, office buildings, restaurants, and senior living centers. To put those recommendations in practice, public and private building owners need financial support.

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Congress should provide immediate direct investment in schools, childcare centers, and other essential public buildings to cover COVID-19 related redesign expenses. For private buildings, Congress should also include the bipartisan Clean Start: Back to Work Tax Credit Act, H.R. 7079, so that small business owners can deduct some of the costs associated with purchasing cleaning supplies and PPE. The current text of that bill should be expanded to cover design costs, as well, as many businesses will have to make significant changes to their layout to keep employees safe and encourage customers to feel safe enough to return.

The federal government must step in because these are significant unexpected costs that are the result of government sanctioned shutdowns. According to the National League of Cities, “70% of cities say one of their most significant unexpected expenditures is on PPE and contracting disinfecting services to keep their communities safe and healthy as public buildings begin to re-open.”ⁱ Small businesses could not have been expected to budget for these costs when the year began. For both state budgets and small businesses already struggling financially, federal support cannot come a moment too soon.

Immediate Economic Relief

While the CARES Act included many important relief measures, there is more to be done. We call on Congress to provide immediate economic relief for entities not fully addressed in the previous CARES Act, including:

- **Renew the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and expand it to include 501c6 organizations**
- **Provide significant funding for state and local governments**

The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) provided much needed support to architecture firms across the country. According to an internal survey of AIA members, roughly 81% of AIA member architecture firms who applied for the PPP received funding through the program.ⁱⁱ However, the PPP excluded nonprofit organizations categorized as 501(c)6 entities. This includes the AIA and most of AIA’s 300 state and local chapters.

These state and local chapters (called “AIA components”) provide high-quality professional educational content to ensure that architects remain current on developments in their field and maintain professional registration. Indeed, many of the components helped their members to apply for the PPP, but could not apply themselves. Their work also benefits the community, as they provide enrichment programs and strive to broaden the talent pipeline of those in the profession through student outreach and funding scholarships for architecture students. Many conferences and other member services had to be canceled this year due to COVID-19, which are a primary revenue stream for many 501(c)6 organizations. We call on Congress to extend the PPP application deadline to September 30 and allow for 501(c)6 organizations to be among the next round of applicants.

Additionally, as state and local governments face unexpected costs coupled with a sharp decline in revenue, many are postponing or canceling local infrastructure projects. According to the National League of Cities, “65% of cities are being forced to delay or completely cancel capital expenditures and infrastructure projects.”ⁱⁱⁱ These projects are a significant revenue source for many architecture firms across

the country. The loss of infrastructure projects send a chilling economic impact through the rest of the community, as well.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors is calling for \$250 billion in “direct, flexible emergency assistance to cities of all sizes.”^{iv} AIA supports this call and urges Congress to provide direct support for state governments, as well.

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Vertical Infrastructure

Despite some encouraging signs a few months ago, it is clear now that the recession will be of longer duration than some economists had originally hoped. Architecture is often a leading indicator on economic forecasts and architecture billings are significantly down over three consecutive months.^v We call on Congress to provide sustained investment to revive the economy, including:

- **A minimum of \$300 billion in vertical infrastructure investment over the next five years**
- **Expand tax incentives that have a proven ability to encourage investment in sustainable building practices, including 179D, 25C, and the Historic Preservation Tax Credit**

As you know, infrastructure investment is a powerful tool to stimulate the economy and provide reassurance to Americans that the coming days will be better. Infrastructure for the 21st Century should not only include investment in roads, bridges, and other horizontal infrastructure; it must also cover vertical infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, affordable housing, and other public buildings.

Infrastructure must be designed to satisfy current needs and anticipate future threats. This global pandemic has laid bare the preexisting resource shortage currently facing many of these facilities. Looking to the future, the World Health Organization has predicted that climate change will contribute to worsening storms and more frequent pandemics.^{vi} Buildings must be resilient in the face of these disasters while also not contributing to the underlying problem by generating greenhouse gas emissions and unhealthy air quality.

Federal infrastructure investment at a minimum of \$300 billion over the next five years can address the existing backlogs in maintenance for vertical infrastructure and modernize it to be better prepared for potential challenges ahead.

Direct infrastructure investment should be paired with updated tax incentives that leverage additional private investment in sustainable retrofits and new construction. The Energy Efficient Commercial Buildings Deduction (179D) has effectively encouraged sustainable retrofits and new builds since 2005. It should be expanded to \$3 per square foot and made permanent. AIA supports the bipartisan S. 2588/ H.R. 4506, the *Home Energy Savings Act* to modernize the Nonbusiness Energy Property Tax Credit (Sec. 25C). Finally, AIA supports the bipartisan H.R. 2825, the *Historic Tax Growth and Opportunity Act*, to expand the rate of the credit for smaller projects. Each of these tax incentives should be included in the next economic recovery package.

Conclusion

After previous health crises, architects and other professionals have worked together to modernize sanitation and change assumptions about public health. Architects can help to imagine cost-effective designs that encourage handwashing and other healthy practices and, when necessary, enable social distancing. Congress must provide funding to modernize America's vertical infrastructure. Together, we must expect more from the built environment than ever before.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to continued work with you.

Sincerely,



Sarah Dodge
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American Institute of Architects (AIA)

ⁱ "Cities Are Essential," National League of Cities, <https://www.nlc.org/sites/default/files/users/user52651/CAE-Local-Impacts-Survey-Infographic.pdf>

ⁱⁱ ABI April 2020, the American Institute of Architects, <https://www.aia.org/pages/6296537-abi-april-2020-business-conditions-at-arch>

ⁱⁱⁱ "Cities Are Essential," National League of Cities, <https://www.nlc.org/sites/default/files/users/user52651/CAE-Local-Impacts-Survey-Infographic.pdf>

^{iv} U.S. Mayors Supplemental Request, Letter, July 21, 2020, U.S. Conference of Mayors, https://filemanager.capwiz.com/filemanager/file_mgr/usmayors/US_Mayors_Supplemental_Request_072120.pdf

^v ABI May 2020, the American Institute of Architects, <https://www.aia.org/pages/6306219-abi-may-2020-architecture-firms-report-ste>

^{vi} "Climate Change and Human Health," the World Health Organization <https://www.who.int/globalchange/climate/summary/en/index5.html>