



April 21, 2020

David Brinkley  
Secretary  
Maryland Department of Budget and Management  
45 Calvert St.  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Secretary Brinkley,

County governments welcome the provisions of your recent letter detailing the local distributions of funding, through the federal CARES Act, to support local health departments and county governments.

We write today to urge you, and your Department, to provide clarity and flexibility with both the funds themselves and the processes governing them. Maryland's county governments are already deeply plunged into this public health and fiscal crisis, and need every assurance that their planning fits with the guidelines your Department has established.

To that end, we raise three things worth your Department's immediate attention:

**Health Departments can be a partner, but not the true administrator, in local funds/spending used under the CARES Act.** Early indications from your letter and its surrounding discussion intimated a hands-on, coordinating role for local health departments with funding outside their domain. This would be an unwise and untoward burden on those agencies, relying on information not readily available to them. Empowering the health departments to review and "sign off" on the financing, personnel, contractual, and equipment expenses incurred by county government could be workable – placing its actual management beneath them would be unreasonable.

**Volunteer fire companies have been uniquely disrupted by this crisis – clarify the CARES funding to backstop them is properly reimbursable.** Maryland's volunteer fire and rescue companies have been denied their fundraising opportunities (public events, which are canceled) and are being left short-staffed (career/volunteer members overlap). Counties may need to target funds to help offset their direct costs, augment protective equipment, or otherwise support these disruptions. Ensuring that they may use federal fund allocations from the CARES Act would fully embolden these counties to do so, swiftly.

Further resources, either within forthcoming federal funds, or as a State priority, may yet be needed to maintain our excellent and precious network of volunteer first responders.

**Prioritize full, flexible, and clear guidelines on eligible spending.** Local governments are responding to their own crises, but its form takes different shapes by jurisdiction. Staff time, protective gear, temporary facilities, and medical treatments are all obvious components of the needed response. Some facets will be less obvious. Timing matters in these crises, so rapid and clear guidance on areas eligible for federal fund use will help each government target its response appropriately. Please coordinate with the appropriate federal agencies, and provide maximum clarity and flexibility in these guidelines.

Counties welcome your partnership during this crisis, and stand ready to collaborate on the responses needed to protect Marylanders everywhere. The actions above will help that shared goal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Sanderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "S".

Michael Sanderson  
Executive Director, MACo