

April 24, 2020

Governor Tony Evers
115 East, Wisconsin State Capitol
2 East Main Street
Madison, WI 53703

Provided via Hand Delivery

Dear Governor Evers,

I'm writing today as Wisconsin continues to navigate these unprecedented times to advocate for Northeast Wisconsin's communities as your Administration is preparing for the allocation, distribution, and expenditure of nearly \$2 billion in federal funding from the Coronavirus Relief Fund passed as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

While many areas around the state have seen momentary surges in cases and few areas of the state have gone unimpacted by COVID-19, outside of Milwaukee County, Brown County has been the epicenter for COVID-19 spread. About half of cases as of the writing of this letter are attributed to the continued operation of three 'essential businesses', and further evidence of community spread has been tied by health officials to Easter weekend get-togethers. The Brown County Health Department, health officials in the City of Green Bay and other local governments, and health care providers in Brown County have been uniquely tasked with addressing the effects of the pandemic in their region.

Thankfully, they have collectively stepped up to the challenge, and have managed to react in real time to the outbreak and are taking courageous steps to identify and isolate cases. The 2,200 test kits sent by the State to Brown County earlier this week are greatly appreciated, but as I've heard in my calls with local officials, this is only a first step. While the state works to acquire more testing supplies and distributes those to areas including Brown County, I'm asking for your help to give Brown County the resources to not only offset their increased emergency response expenses, but to provide them with the financial flexibility to create a more robust response at the local level.

The CARES Act provides for a direct allocation of funds to local governments with a population larger than 500,000. In Wisconsin, that includes Dane and Milwaukee Counties and the City of Milwaukee. However, Brown County and its communities do not meet this narrow threshold, despite the immense Covid-19 response expenses these local governments have incurred. Additionally, efforts in the greater Madison and Milwaukee areas have received additional assistance from the state through the establishment of isolation centers, among other steps. Meanwhile, Brown County has taken it upon themselves to set up isolation centers at their own expense.

Through their action in Health Alert #6, the Department of Health Services and the State Emergency Operations Center are working to make more tests available to providers. However, it must be noted that it's also very important we support county health departments' coordinated approaches to these outbreaks, particularly the efforts in Brown County which are helping to manage several different methods by the various different providers.

As such, I'm asking you to please consider providing a direct payment from the Coronavirus Relief Fund to Brown County as soon as feasible to allow them to increase and solidify their efforts. These financial resources could assist the County government, local municipal governments, and providers in building stronger partnerships that will bolster testing efforts, provide for more direct tracing, tracking and isolation, and ensure that this outbreak is contained and controlled expediently.

While I believe that funding to Brown County for their public health response should be a fundamental priority for coronavirus relief funding, the impact from COVID-19 hasn't just been on local governments and human health. As your Administration prepares an approach to alleviate some of the economic impact from this pandemic and the \$1.978 billion in federal funding arrives in the state coffers for your allocation, I'm asking you to please keep the impact to businesses statewide in-mind.

While certain areas of the state have experienced worse impacts to public health and therefore may require additional funding to help reimburse prior expenditures and bolster ongoing efforts, the economic impact has been felt statewide, not just in dense population centers. According to a recent UW-Oshkosh survey of businesses, 35% said they would be forced to close within three months of these restrictions being in place. In the early days of the 'Safer at Home' order, \$95 million worth of inventory and \$126 million in income was lost, adding to the over \$400 million in other impacts felt statewide.

Even businesses that were not forced to close during the pandemic faced burdens. Whether it be declines in productivity due to preventative measures, lost revenue as some businesses turned production from profit-generation lines to PPE or other necessary supplies, or falling market prices as seen in our agricultural industry, all businesses have suffered as a result of this pandemic. Some of this economic harm has been briefly pacified by federal efforts, but with the nearly \$2 billion available at your discretion, there's an defining opportunity to pick-up where the federal government left off and help our business community survive in these trying times and to help them prepare to thrive after Wisconsin defeats this pandemic. As you create a plan that considers the distribution of Coronavirus Relief Funding to businesses due to expenditures they incurred or revenues they lost from COVID-19, please take a statewide approach that helps businesses in communities of all sizes.

I appreciate your time and attention to these matters and I respect the enormous task you have in front of you when determining how to equitably distribute these federal funds. I sincerely hope you will take note of my comments as our state continues our response to COVID-19. I look forward to future discussions on these ideas with you or a member of your staff in the days to come.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Cowles', is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Senator Robert L. Cowles
Proudly Serving Wisconsin's 2nd Senate District

cc: Maggie Gau, Chief of Staff
Zach Madden, Legislative Liaison