

Dear Senators Merkley and Wyden and Representative Walden (each will have their own letter),

As a smaller community that relies on both the visitor economy and a diverse sector of small businesses, the COVID-19 crisis has hit Ashland particularly hard economically. Fortunately, our citizens, business owners, civic organizations, and local government entities have been very disciplined in their response to this public health threat, so we have managed to avoid the tragedies that we have seen unfold in places like Italy and New York.

The financial relief from the federal government has been a critical lifeline for our small businesses and local workers who have suddenly found themselves without a job right at the beginning of our tourist season. We have also appreciated the assistance provided to medical providers during this time. Thank you for your efforts to secure that assistance and get it to the ground to help Oregonians.

While there have been hiccups and difficulties moving that amount of aid in such a short time, we know that dedicated public servants are working tirelessly at both the federal and state levels to get those funds into the hands of those who need them. As this funding continues to roll out, we ask that you ensure strong action is taken to monitor how funding is distributed from financial institutions to ensure that small businesses are given fair access in that process.

As we move into this next phase of federal relief, we ask that you place a strong emphasis on providing assistance to local governments to help us weather the financial challenges that are on the horizon due to shortfalls in revenue sources.

Here at the City of Ashland, we are anticipating a \$6 million shortfall by June 30, 2021 due to lost revenue from tourist activities because of COVID-19. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival is not operating this summer and is planning to open only for a short season in early September. High drought and wildfire risk also pose a threat to our community's ability to draw visitors this summer, assuming physical distancing restrictions are lifted in time for summer visitors to be a possibility.

As you know, municipal government provides the essential services that create the foundation for a strong economy. With the disruptions caused by COVID-19, it is critical that those services remain intact in order to provide for the safety and wellbeing of our citizens. Much of the shortfall we are expecting will arrive in our general fund, which has been severely stretched for the last several budget cycles due to the PERS funding crisis. The City of Ashland, and cities across our state, need assistance from the federal government to navigate this crisis or the next round of layoffs will be in local government.

We are supportive of the efforts of the National League of Cities, National Association of Counties, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors to ensure that local governments are included as aid recipients in upcoming relief legislation. We urge you to prioritize their asks in the next stimulus package.

Sincerely,

Mayor John Stromberg

Councilor Dennis Slattery

Councilor Julie Akins

Councilor Rich Rosenthal

Councilor Stef Seffinger

Councilor Stephen Jensen

Councilor Tonya Graham