April 27, 2020

The Honorable Senator Sherrod Brown
503 Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Senator Rob Portman
448 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Brown and Portman:

On behalf of the local government leadership representing the two million residents of the Central Ohio region, we thank you for your leadership and offer our sincere thanks for all of your efforts at the federal level to address the public health and economic crisis associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and the Central Ohio Mayors and Managers Association represent the cities, counties, villages and townships in the Columbus area. Local governments are tasked with the most fundamental responsibility of ensuring the public health, safety and welfare of its citizens and are on the frontlines of this pandemic. Please remember that our first responders – police, fire, emergency medical personnel, and dispatchers – are the first line of response to citizens in need.

As you know, the generous outpouring of aid coming out of the multiple phases of the CARES Act have done much to assist medical providers, small businesses, and the unemployed. Although, Central Ohio local governments are pleased with the CARES act and the recently passed phase 3.5 relief package, what neither bill solved is the revenue shortfalls state and local governments face. Ohio local governments are particularly vulnerable during this volatile economy due to municipal governments reliance on the income tax and county governments to the sales tax.

To that end, we thank you both for the submission of your joint letter to Secretary Mnuchin encouraging new funding for state and local governments and that such funding is robust, dedicated, and flexible.
We implore your colleagues to act to stabilize the situation to ensure that our local governments have the basic and essential resources required to protect and serve our communities. We believe the following initiatives should become top priorities in the next phase of the CARES Act:

1. **Allow all local governments, including those with a population under 500,000, to be eligible to receive direct grants for emergency COVID-19 expenditures.** If the eligibility is lowered, but not granted to all local governments, we request that smaller local governments can jointly apply for federal relief funds. In addition, we request amending the language in the CARES Act to include COVID-19 revenue shortfalls in the calculations.

2. **Waive all federal cost shares requirements for FEMA grants.** Raising the federal cost share has been done after many major disasters, including Hurricane Sandy (2012), the flooding in Louisiana in (2016), and Hurricane Irma (2019).

3. **Make state and local governments eligible for the emergency paid leave tax credits** that were provided to the private sector in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.

4. **Restore Advance Refunding of Tax-Exempt Bonds (H.R. 2772):** Restoring the ability for governments and other qualifying entities to advance refund tax-exempt municipal bonds would free up billions of dollars that governments and nonprofits could spend on other projects.

The adoption of these legislative priorities will go a long way towards assisting Central Ohio’s local governments in providing essential public services through the pandemic until full recovery of the nation’s economy. We reiterate our sincere appreciation for your steadfast service to our nation and state during these most difficult times and for all that you have done to assist our communities in responding to this crisis.

Kind regards,

David A. Collinsworth, Chair  
Central Ohio Mayors & Managers Assoc.

William Murdock, Executive Director  
Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission