April 15, 2020

Dear Members of the Western New York Congressional Delegation,

I am writing to request that you include $250 billion in direct support to local governments in the stimulus legislation currently being considered. To date, much of the potential assistance to local governments has been reserved for municipalities with populations of 500,000 people or more and all of the direct assistance has gone to the cities with populations of one million or more. As the leader of a medium-sized city, I am facing the same financial strains that these larger cities are facing. Small and medium-sized cities cannot afford to wait for state governments to funnel funding to them if it is to come in the timeframe when it can do the most good. Therefore, a direct mechanism for aiding cities of less than 500,000 people should be established in the next round of federal aid.

The City of Buffalo has over 3,000 employees and their work has been critical to our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A reliable and continuously functioning city government ensures that critical infrastructure projects remain ongoing, public safety and order is preserved, permits and approvals for affordable housing projects are granted, trash is picked up, young people have access to online recreational resources, social service programs are still meeting the needs of vulnerable residents, and public parks, buildings and other spaces are being properly maintained and sanitized. Continuing these operations without disruption—in the face of significantly falling revenues—will soon not be possible unless there is some form of assistance specifically designed for cities like Buffalo. The promise of direct federal aid will ensure that we can still meet our budgetary obligations despite declining revenue sources caused by the physical distancing and non-essential business shut downs required to effectively confront COVID-19. Direct aid will enable us to restore the confidence of residents, lenders and other interested parties in our economic soundness and recovery.

As one of the Western New York region’s largest employers, whose employees enjoy health benefits that are especially critical to confronting a public health crisis, supporting our ability to sustain that workforce should be a highly desirable goal. Creating an aid mechanism that allows us to retain our workforce until economic and fiscal conditions first stabilize, and then return to something closer to normal, is therefore vital to both New York’s and the nation’s ability to mitigate the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Without this aid, we risk the loss of hundreds of employees who will then create an additional strain on the unemployment and assistance programs that are already facing an unprecedented level of demand.
Removing any additional strain on those resources by appropriating funding directly to small and medium-sized cities will therefore have an overall positive impact on our economic outlook.

I hope you will give this request strong consideration and understand the tenuous situation myself and thousands of other mayors find ourselves in. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at any time. Thank you for your leadership, ongoing support and consideration during this extremely challenging moment in our nation's history.

Sincerely,

Byron W. Brown
Mayor