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What Cities Need From the Biden Administration in the First 100 Days.

Covid-19 financial relief, housing help and gun violence research are among the top priorities for local governments.

Municipal leaders have a privileged position in America: We see first-hand how policies affect the 200 million people we represent in our cities, towns and villages. We are also the first to respond to the challenges our communities face, and the first to provide the resources our residents need.

While most of the last 10 months have been devoted to our immediate duty to protect our residents from the spread of Covid-19, it has also given us an important opportunity to examine the future of our hometowns, including how to address the systemic challenges that predated — and are now exacerbated by — the pandemic. Whether it's ensuring our cities are built to meet the needs of all our residents, providing help for working families struggling to support their households, or eradicating persistent inequities in our civic institutions, the challenges before us have been thrown into sharp relief.

Building more equitable cities at a time when we are fighting an uphill battle to rebuild our economy is no easy task. To tackle the monumental challenges before us, we need more from officials at the federal level. Below are the five most urgent priorities for local governments that the National League of Cities asks the administration of President-elect Joe Biden to address in its first 100 days.

Provide Covid-19 Relief for Local Governments

Local governments are facing more than \$360 billion in revenue shortfalls over the next three years due to the pandemic, forcing municipal leaders to grapple with devastating cuts to essential services and personnel — including those that have been integral to local pandemic response and economic recovery efforts.

In Ruston, Louisiana, Mayor Ronny Walker said his city “wouldn't have had to cut a single person from our payroll if Congress had done for cities what they did for businesses” through the Paycheck Protection Program. Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto said laying off 10% of city employees would only make up a quarter of his city's budget shortfall for the next year, and that in the coming years, “what you're going to see in cities is more cuts to essential services.”

While negotiations over a comprehensive Covid-19 relief package remain stalled in the current lame duck session of Congress, local leaders are making difficult decisions to protect families, municipal workers and America's economic future. It's past time for the federal government to fulfill its responsibility to our local heroes serving on the front lines of the pandemic, and we strongly urge the Biden administration to work collaboratively with both parties in Congress to secure a Covid-19 relief package that provides direct federal aid to local governments and municipalities of all sizes.

Build Sustainable Infrastructure

Even before the pandemic, much of our nation's infrastructure was in dire need of repair, improvement and modernization to meet the demands of the 21st century. Local governments have been forced to delay or cancel projects to repair roads, water systems and other critical infrastructure due to budgetary constraints caused by the pandemic, underscoring why it is more important than ever for the federal government to support infrastructure projects that will help put Americans back to work. Just this week, New York City's Metropolitan Transit Authority was forced to consider a plan to cut 40% of weekday subway services and lay off more than 9,000 transit workers absent support from the federal government — an “end to the New York way of life,” as one official said.

Current transportation funding sources like the Highway Trust Fund are on track to be depleted as soon as 2021, according to recent CBO projections. By providing grants, tools and resources to support local infrastructure efforts, the federal government can do more than just ensure the safety and mobility of our communities; it can help make our communities more resilient in the face of extreme weather events and natural disasters, many of which we faced this year in the midst of the global pandemic.

It is also essential that the administration make investments in broadband service. With more people working and schooling from home, the need is clearer than ever before to ensure reliable, affordable broadband access for all Americans — particularly those in small and rural communities.

Provide Support for Building a Skilled Workforce

With the nature of work rapidly evolving due to the Covid-19 pandemic and technological advancements, we need enhanced workforce training programs to ensure our residents and communities can continue to play a central role in our nation's economic recovery. As more Americans prepare to re-enter the workforce after historic levels of unemployment, it is necessary for the Biden administration to promote apprenticeship programs, expand financial aid programs for workforce skills training and create new pathways to successful careers for unemployed and underemployed Americans.

By investing in skills training and services to support participants, such as child care and transportation, the federal government can help city leaders build upon successful workforce development programs — particularly those that help remove barriers to accessing education and improve the likelihood that students will be able to finish college. This is particularly important for postsecondary students attending college during the current Covid-19 crisis who are being forced to remain or return to homes that may lack access to the internet or who, in some cases, may have no home at all.

Cities are counting on Biden to empower local workforce solutions, streamline federal funding and drive new resources into proven solutions to ensure that all people have opportunities to thrive.

End Housing Instability and Homelessness

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for housing instability in the U.S. The nationwide moratorium on evictions has not prevented some landlords from evicting their residents, and 8 million tenants face the prospect of evictions when it ends in January 2021.

With more Americans out of work and unable to afford their basic needs, including housing, it is critical for the new administration to address housing instability and homelessness.

Cities need new policy solutions to stabilize and stem the loss of public and affordable housing. They

also need the resources to expand promising ideas like “housing first programs,” which focus on providing immediate permanent housing — regardless of circumstance — to people experiencing homelessness. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, several housing-first pilots were yielding notable progress. President-elect Biden can take meaningful steps toward ending homelessness by expanding these types of programs, as well as those that provide mental health and emergency services that residents need to stay stable and sheltered.

Reduce Gun Violence

Gun violence continues to plague our society, claiming the lives of thousands of Americans each year and tearing apart the very fabric of our communities. Our nation has seen a rise in gun violence since the onset of the pandemic, creating twin public health crises that threaten to undermine the safety that local leaders are entrusted to deliver to their residents.

The National League of Cities calls on Biden to convene a national commission on gun violence, including elected officials from all levels of government, victims’ family members, survivors, gun advocates and law enforcement to offer recommendations on ways to reduce gun violence. In recognizing gun violence as a public health issue, the Biden administration should provide funding to the Centers for Disease Control to conduct comprehensive research to identify the underlying causes that lead to gun violence and mass shootings in communities.

If we are going to truly “Build Back Better”— a central theme of Biden’s campaign — we must ensure the administration maintains a strong and close working relationship with local leaders from across the country. We know our communities best and are best positioned to help the new administration address the systemic issues that have long impacted them, only to now be exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

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