

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 26, 2020

The Honorable Joseph J. Simons  
Chairman  
Federal Trade Commission  
600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Chairman Simons:

We write to express our serious concern following recent reports highlighting coronavirus (COVID-19)-related scams, including scams that target seniors, and to request information on what the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is doing to ensure that seniors are protected from those attempting to financially exploit them during the pandemic.

To date, there are more than 68,500 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the U.S.,<sup>1</sup> the most severe of which are among seniors.<sup>2</sup> At this time of heightened public fears, reports have highlighted that scams pertaining to the coronavirus are increasing,<sup>3</sup> and that seniors—arguably the most vulnerable population to both the coronavirus and bad actors—have been targeted with calls telling them that the COVID-19 vaccination is ready when no such treatment currently exists.<sup>4</sup> Other reports have outlined how scammers have gone to the homes of elderly people to administer fake tests while also charging them and obtaining their social security numbers.<sup>5</sup> Although the FTC has sent warning letters to seven sellers of fraudulent COVID-19 treatments,<sup>6</sup> we are concerned that further action is needed to protect the financial wellbeing of seniors—who lose an estimated \$3 billion annually from financial scams.<sup>7</sup>

While the FTC has added information to its website to inform consumers about COVID-19 scams, we believe additional measures must be taken to educate seniors and provide consumers

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Mitch. (2020, March 26). *Coronavirus in the U.S.: Latest Map and Case Count*. New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html>; McLaughlin, Elliott, Maxouris, Christina, and Almasy, Steve. (2020, March 25). *Wednesday has been the deadliest day in reported coronavirus deaths*. CNN. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/25/health/coronavirus-state-actions-wednesday/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> Adler, Sarah Elizabeth (2020, March 14). *Why Coronavirus Hit Older Adults Hardest*. AARP. Retrieved from <https://www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2020/coronavirus-severe-seniors.html>

<sup>3</sup> Paul, Kari. (2020, March 19). *U.S. authorities battle surge in coronavirus scams, from phishing to fake treatments*. The Guardian. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/19/coronavirus-scams-phishing-fake-treatments>

<sup>4</sup> KWQC Staff. (2020, March 12) *Fort Madison police warn of scam targeting elderly with COVID-19 vaccine*. KWQC News. Retrieved from <https://www.kwqc.com/content/news/Fort-Madison-police-warn-of-scam-targeting-elderly-with-COVID-19-vaccine-568747101.html>

<sup>5</sup> Gilker, Kathryn. (2020, March 17) *Scammers targeting elderly NWA residents during COVID-19 pandemic*. 5 News. Retrieved from <https://www.5newsline.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/scammers-pretend-to-be-cdc-doing-covid-19-testing/527-1b39fcd4-49cd-4d0d-a186-89f8a4e377cd>

<sup>6</sup> Federal Trade Commission. (2020, March 9). *FTC, FDA Send Warning Letters to Seven Companies about Unsupported Claims that Products Can Treat or Prevent Coronavirus*. Retrieved from <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2020/03/ftc-fda-send-warning-letters-seven-companies-about-unsupported>

<sup>7</sup> Senate Committee on Aging. (2019, January 16) *Aging Committee Examines Law Enforcement's Efforts to Crack Down on Fraud That Costs Seniors Billions Annually*. Retrieved from <https://www.aging.senate.gov/press-releases/aging-committee-examines-law-enforcements-efforts-to-crack-down-on-fraud-that-costs-seniors-billions-annually>

with information about how to seek recourse if they are targeted. Given the seriousness of this issue and the growing public health emergency, we urge the FTC to take action to better inform seniors about COVID-19-related fraud and assist victims in understanding their recourse options. We also respectfully request that you respond to the following questions:

1. What efforts is the FTC currently undertaking to educate seniors about COVID-19-related fraud and how to protect themselves?
2. What additional measures is the FTC planning to better protect seniors and assist them should they become victims of COVID-19-related fraud?
3. How is the FTC working with other federal agencies to combat COVID-19-related scams?
4. What additional resources does the FTC need in order to better protect seniors from COVID-19 and other fraud and educate them on how to prevent it?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



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Jerry Moran  
United States Senator



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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



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Shelley Moore Capito  
United States Senator



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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



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Todd Young  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



Roy Blunt  
United States Senator

/S/

Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



John Thune  
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



Deb Fischer  
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator

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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Martha McSally  
United States Senator




Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



John Barrasso  
United States Senator


| /S/ |  
Robert P. Casey  
United States Senator


  
Steve Daines  
United States Senator

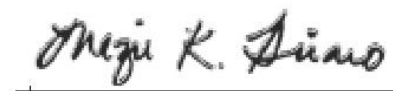
  
Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator


  
Joni Ernst  
United States Senator


  
Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

  
Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

  
Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

  
Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator

  
Tina Smith  
United States Senator

  
Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator





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Jack Reed  
United States Senator

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Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator



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Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator



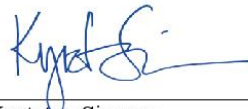
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Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



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Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



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Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator