

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 26, 2021

Mr. Charles P. Rettig
Commissioner
Internal Revenue Service
1111 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20224

Mr. Andrew M. Saul
Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Blvd.
Baltimore, MD 21235

Dear Commissioners Rettig and Saul:

As Members of the House Democratic Caucus Task Force on Aging and Families, we are thankful for your commitment to addressing the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic crisis. While the spring 2020 Economic Impact Payment (EIP) provision helped many Americans – in particular seniors, the age group most affected by the pandemic – there are urgent, troubling issues with the current Economic Impact Payment (EIP) rollout that must be addressed as we move forward in legislating future stimulus payments.

Our offices have heard from numerous older constituents who have not yet received their December EIP. This has been a particular issue for those who receive Social Security payments and do not regularly file taxes. For those who did not receive an EIP via mail or direct deposit, their only option to receive a payment is through filing taxes. Many seniors receiving Social Security payments have not filed taxes in years, primarily because they are not required to do so. Further, for seniors on Social Security or other limited forms of income, filing taxes through an online portal is often impossible due to unfamiliarity with the process and lack of access to a computer. Additionally, due to the pandemic, seniors in our districts have been hesitant to seek in-person help due to risk of COVID-19 transmission and lack of access.

This is an urgent situation, particularly because the people who need stimulus money the most – seniors and low-income persons – are the very ones who cannot access the online portals, online tax filing, or in-person tax assistance. By July 2020, there was a nearly 60 percent increase in older adult food insecurity, with 13.5 percent of adults over 60 experiencing this challenge.¹ Seniors desperately need their EIPs to pay for groceries, utilities, and rent. There must be an easier way for seniors and other vulnerable, low-income persons to receive their much-needed stimulus payments.

We ask that you take the following steps to ensure equitable and efficient rollout of stimulus checks to seniors:

Provide a simplified 1040 or a one-page paper form for those who do not have online access to apply for an EIP. The form need only request information that seniors have readily available and should be made public and be easily accessible. The form should also be submitted to a separate mailing address to allow for prioritization and to avoid comingling with backlogged or incoming tax refund requests.

Create an online portal specifically for adults who do not file taxes to help simplify the filing process. This portal would use the form(s) mentioned above and must be easy to navigate.


Develop and support a federal 1-800 helpline specifically for seniors or partner with a nationally trusted organization to do so. In-person help is a high-risk activity during the public health emergency and may not be physically possible for seniors and low-income persons. This number should be a one-stop shop where seniors can receive answers to filing questions and then mail the completed paperwork, confident that a stimulus check will be sent to them or directly deposited into the account where they receive their Social Security payments. The helpline should be centralized, well-staffed, and offer culturally competent customer service in several languages, just like the 1-800 vaccine line that has been suggested by AARP.

Finally, payments should be sent as checks or direct deposit, not as Economic Impact Payment debit cards. Our constituents have been confused by mailed debit cards, often shredding them and thinking the cards are a scam. Activating the EIP card to having cash in hand is a multi-step process that can be quite complex, especially for older persons and those without internet access. If a person is not able to look up non-fee ATMs to use their EIP card, fees will be subtracted from the EIP funds, taking much needed money away from those who need it most.


As Members of Congress, we work to prioritize and address the needs of older Americans and their families. We thank the IRS for its efforts to address the current economic crisis and request that it prepares for a future stimulus check rollout with seniors' unique needs in mind.


Sincerely,


The House Democratic Caucus Task Force on Aging and Families



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Member of Congress



DORIS MATSUI
Member of Congress


CONOR LAMB
Member of Congress


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¹ Alexandra Ashbrook, "Nearly 60 Percent Increase in Older Adult Food Insecurity During COVID-19: Federal Action on SNAP Needed Now," <https://frac.org/blog/nearly-60-percent-increase-in-older-adult-food-insecurity-during-covid-19-federal-action-on-snap-needed-now>