

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.,¹ the most severe of which are among seniors.² At this time of heightened public fears, reports have highlighted that scams pertaining to the coronavirus are increasing,³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ Although the FTC has sent warning letters to seven sellers of fraudulent COVID-19 treatments,⁶ 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.⁷

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

¹ 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 Almasly, 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>

² 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>.

³ 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>

⁴ 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>

⁵ Gilker, Kathryn. (2020, March 17) *Scammers targeting elderly NWA residents during COVID-19 pandemic*. 5 News. Retrieved from <https://www.5newsonline.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/scammers-pretend-to-be-cdc-doing-covid-19-testing/527-1b39fcde-49cd-4d0d-a186-89f8a4e377cd>

⁶ 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>

⁷ 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,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Jerry Moran
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



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
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Deb Fischer
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Catherine Cortez Masto
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Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

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Richard J. Durbin
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Martha McSally
United States Senator




Ron Wyden
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John Barrasso
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Steve Daines
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