

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 7, 2021

The Honorable Rebecca Kelly Slaughter  
Acting Chairwoman  
Federal Trade Commission  
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest  
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Chairwoman Slaughter:

I write today requesting information about how the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) plans to use the funds in the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* (P.L. 117-2) to combat scammers who are attempting to use the COVID-19 pandemic to defraud Americans. These scams take many forms, including offering expedited access to economic stimulus payments for a fee, impersonating public health officials or health insurers or providers, and selling phony products and treatments claimed to prevent or cure COVID-19. These illegal scams are a danger to the health and financial security of Americans.

In the *American Rescue Plan* Congress provided the FTC with an additional \$30.4 million to operate the Consumer Sentinel Network, educate consumers, and increase the FTC workforce to address unfair or deceptive acts or practices.<sup>1</sup> Across the United States, of April 5, 2021, the FTC has received 425,534 reports of pandemic-related fraud, identity theft, and other scams, with estimated costs to Americans of more than \$397 million. The Consumer Sentinel Network records 1,461 reports from New Hampshire during the same period of time, with a cumulative loss to Granite Staters of \$954,000. These reported scams sharply increase in mid-March 2020, with spikes in early January 2021 and March 15, 2021.<sup>2</sup>

The FTC has taken a number of steps so far to combat unscrupulous marketers using the COVID-19 public health emergency to take advantage of Americans. Those have included enforcement actions like temporary restraining orders, permanent injunctions, and other equitable relief, as well as consumer education and outreach. To further understand the FTC's actions to date, and potential upcoming actions, I request a response to the following questions by April 30, 2021:

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<sup>1</sup> American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, P.L. 117-2, 117<sup>th</sup> Cong. § 7404 (2021)

<sup>2</sup> Federal Trade Commission, *FTC COVID-19 and Stimulus Reports*, (April 5, 2021)

<https://public.tableau.com/profile/federal.trade.commission#!/vizhome/COVID-19andStimulusReports/Map>

1. The FTC collects reports on scams using terms related to COVID-19 or direct individual stimulus payment check or debit cards. Please describe the nature of reported scams and any characteristics unique to either COVID-19 or individual direct stimulus payments, including how such scams may have evolved across each of the three rounds of individual direct stimulus payments disbursements (those authorized under section 2201 of P.L. 116-136, section 272 of P.L. 116-260, and section 9601 of P.L. 117-2).
2. Please describe the types of COVID-19- and stimulus-specific reports received by the FTC over the course of the pandemic, including any new scams reported following the passage of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021* (P.L. 116-260) and the *American Rescue Plan*.
3. How is the FTC contemplating using funding from the *American Rescue Plan* to combat specific types of fraud related to COVID-19 and stimulus payments?

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your response.

With every good wish,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Maggie Hassan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

cc: Commissioner Noah Joshua Phillips  
cc: Commissioner Rohit Chopra  
cc: Commissioner Christine S. Wilson