

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

May 5, 2020

The Honorable Charles P. Rettig
Commissioner
Internal Revenue Service
1111 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20224

Dear Commissioner Rettig,

I write regarding the IRS' customer service and legislative liaison functions and their importance to Members of Congress in addressing constituent needs during these challenging times.

As you know, federal, state and local efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 is resulting in mass work-from-home policies, quarantines and shelter in place orders. These efforts to address the public health crisis and save lives are disrupting the normal functioning of the economy, which places a disproportionate burden on families and small businesses that live and operate paycheck-to-paycheck.

In order to help American families and their employers make ends-meet through these difficult times, Congress passed H.R. 748, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Among other provisions, the CARES Act provides economic impact payments of up to \$1,200 for eligible individuals (\$2,400 for married couples) and \$500 for qualified dependents. Other important and complimentary provisions of the CARES Act provide assistance to small businesses and state unemployment insurance programs.

While my constituents have proven their resilience in the face of this unprecedented crisis, they worry about their job security, how they will pay their monthly mortgage or rent, and feed their families. Congress created these relief measures to sustain individuals through the crisis and ensure they have jobs to return to as businesses begin to reopen: we owe Americans the fastest possible implementation of this assistance, but it is also crucial that our constituents are provided clarity by agencies on whether they will be provided assistance in the first place, what additional steps may be required of them to obtain or appeal for assistance, the total amount of assistance that can be expected, and when the receipt of that assistance can be expected. Without this clarity, individuals cannot properly budget their resources during a critical time to do so.

I understand the agencies face unprecedented logistical challenges in implementing these relief efforts. But feedback from my constituents indicates that the IRS has performed worse than all other federal agencies in answering questions or resolving the problems they encounter during this time, particularly relating to the economic impact payments, but extending to tax-related

issues, and other matters overseen by your agency that cannot be answered through FAQs posted to your website. These customer service issues are epitomized by the IRS website's 'Let Us Help You' section, which notifies readers that live phone assistance remains unavailable, even in May.

Without direct access to the IRS, constituents often turn to Members of Congress to seek answers to their time-sensitive questions. However, my staff reports that of the dozens of inquiries submitted to IRS Congressional liaisons, barely any responses have been received or even acknowledged. My direct interactions with hundreds of constituents with IRS issues confirm these problems.

The Small Business Administration (SBA) has faced similar, if not greater challenges in designing and implementing its Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loan assistance measures. However, SBA can be contacted and although some responses are slower than my constituents or I would prefer, answers are nonetheless, generally provided.

You are aware that a significant focus for Congressional oversight of the IRS has focused on improving longstanding problems relating to customer service. Most of these issues predate your tenure at the agency, but as Congress resumes its normal functions, there will be considerable interest among Members on how the agency performed in assisting constituents during this unprecedented time of need.

With this in mind, I encourage you to do whatever it takes to reopen lines of communication to the public. I appreciate your attention to this matter and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Stivers".

Steve Stivers
Member of Congress