

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051
MINORITY (202) 225-5074
<https://oversight.house.gov>

January 30, 2021

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

As the Senate prepares again to work with the House on crafting the next emergency legislative relief package, we write to urge you to consider funding federal information technology (IT) modernization and cybersecurity efforts in President Biden's American Rescue Plan, which includes \$9 billion for the Technology Modernization Fund (TMF).

For nearly a year, our country has battled the impacts from the global pandemic. At the beginning, Congress worked together to provide unprecedented levels of economic assistance to millions of Americans facing illness, unemployment, food insecurity, and an inability to pay their mortgages or rent. Unfortunately, the roll out of that assistance was severely hindered by federal and state IT infrastructure that has been neglected for decades, leaving it vulnerable to cyberattacks and other costly breakdowns.

In just a few days, the United States coronavirus death toll will reach 450,000.¹ In addition to soaring coronavirus cases and deaths, our country is also experiencing another spike in unemployment. Two weeks ago, our country hit the highest number of unemployment claims filed since July 2020 when Department of Labor reported that initial claims exceeded one million.²

Congress is now in the midst of negotiating the distribution of unprecedented levels of financial and program support to the American people. We cannot afford to ignore the lessons of the last year and let antiquated IT systems impede Congress and the Administration from getting funding and services to those who need it most.

¹ *Coronavirus in the U.S.: Latest Map and Case Count*, New York Times (Jan. 20, 2021) (online at www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html).

² *Unemployment Claims Rise Sharply, Showing New Economic Pain*, New York Times (Jan. 14, 2021) (online at www.nytimes.com/2021/01/14/business/economy/unemployment-claims.html).

Without modern and nimble IT systems, the federal government cannot deliver critical payments and services to individuals, families, and businesses who rely on them. Federal agencies are operating in a new, unplanned, work-from-home status. Many agencies are still unable to adjust to this new virtual environment because of historical and chronic failures to invest in critical IT modernization.

Federal agencies are working on critical initiatives addressing the coronavirus pandemic. The Department of Health and Human Services is distributing funds and resources to hospitals and healthcare providers on the frontlines of the coronavirus response. The Federal Emergency Management Agency is a key player in coordinating with state, Tribal, and territorial authorities to distribute coronavirus vaccines.

Federal agencies are also helping people grapple with the impacts of the pandemic. The Internal Revenue Service is administering the delivery of critical stimulus checks used to keep food on tables, the Small Business Administration is saving businesses who are on the brink of closing, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development are assisting families from becoming homeless.

On January 14, 2021, President Joe Biden released a \$1.9 trillion plan to help our country recover from the economic instability catalyzed by the pandemic.³ The \$1.9 trillion plan includes funding for vaccination distribution, additional unemployment benefits, and federal IT modernization and security upgrades. Specifically, the plan calls for a transformative \$9 billion for the TMF.

Congress established the TMF as part of the bipartisan Modernizing Government Technology Act to help agencies kick-start IT modernization efforts.⁴ These IT modernization efforts include replacing legacy systems of agencies, removing longstanding cyber vulnerabilities in systems that can be exploited by bad actors in attacks like SolarWinds.

Yet, one of the primary challenges facing federal IT modernization is the lack of sustained and robust Congressional investment in the fund. The TMF has been chronically underfunded since its inception. To date, Congress has approved only \$150 million for the TMF, despite myriad project proposals from federal agencies totaling more than \$500 million.⁵ Existing funding currently fails to meet the needs of federal agencies. We cannot allow a failure to invest in technology prevent us, once again, from effectively implementing lifesaving policies and programs.

³ Biden-Harris Transition, *Press Release: Fact Sheet: President-elect Biden Announces American Rescue Plan* (Jan. 14, 2021) (online at mailchi.mp/bidentransition/ascertainment-news-statement-3589994?e=9df75180c1).

⁴ Pub. L. No. 115-91 (2017) (online at www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ91/PLAW-115publ91.pdf).

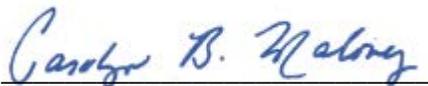
⁵ *TMF Gets \$25 Million Boost in Funding Bill*, Federal Computer Week (Dec. 16, 2019) (online at fcw.com/articles/2019/12/16/tmf-boost-approps-mazmanian.aspx); Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on Government Operations, *Hearing on Federal IT Modernization: How the Coronavirus Exposed Outdated Systems*, 116th Cong. (July 20, 2020) (online at oversight.house.gov/legislation/hearings/federal-it-modernization-how-the-coronavirus-exposed-outdated-systems).

Time is running out. Lives are on the line. Now is the time in this upcoming legislative package to finally inject the long-overdue funding needed to overhaul federal IT systems that have consistently delayed or prevented the delivery of life-saving programs and services.

That is why we respectfully request that any forthcoming emergency legislative relief package meets the President's funding request of \$10 billion to modernize federal IT, including \$9 billion for the TMF. The TMF is the primary vehicle for these funds because it can move assistance quickly and strategically to agencies that need it the most. We must begin to address IT investments now, or we will continue down the same path as before, unable to deliver critical services to the public at a time when our country needs it the most.

We look forward to working with you to create the agency capacity and Congressional oversight necessary to ensure this funding brings about transformative IT investments.

Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Gerald E. Connolly
Chairman
Subcommittee on Government
Operations

cc: The Honorable James R. Comer, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Jody B. Hice, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Government Operations