

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1806

April 15, 2020

President Donald J. Trump
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Mr. President:

Over the past few weeks, Congress has passed significant legislation to expand federal support to our small businesses, families, and all who have been negatively impacted by the spread of COVID-19. Despite the historic, overperforming, pre-coronavirus economy under your leadership, more than 17 million Americans have applied for unemployment benefits in the past month alone—the greatest number since the Great Depression. Since the beginning of this crisis, our offices have been inundated with requests from constituents asking us to help them navigate the landscape of newly available resources to get them through this time of uncertainty.

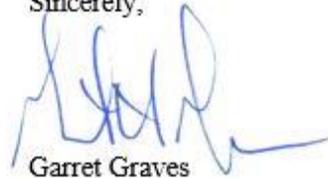
Massive federal programs – ranging from Social Security to the Veterans benefits – serve hundreds of millions of people. Too often Americans fall through the cracks or get caught in the gears of government programs. Our jobs as Members of Congress are to ensure these folks receive the help they need while supporting the Administration’s efforts to improve program results and customer service.

A major impediment to supporting these requests is the requirement to obtain official permission, in writing, to act on a constituent’s behalf. This is a relic of the pre-internet, pre-cell phone Privacy Act of 1974, and mandates that we get written permission to act on a constituent’s behalf. What does that take in April of 2020? Internet connectivity, a printer, paper, printer ink, a pen, a scanner, and an email address. That’s seven prerequisites before our staff can even make a call to a federal agency. If an individual doesn’t have access to all seven of those products, we might ask them to drive into our offices to sign permission forms in-person. As you know, this is no longer an option in this time of social distancing. We continue to be hamstrung by these mandates, despite the fact that Congress already passed a law to change them:

The Creating Advanced Streamlined Electronic Services (CASES) for Constituents Act of 2019 (P.L. 116-50) requires the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to provide guidance requiring federal agencies to accept electronic consent as a valid way to give written permission. While we are still within the one-year period for this guidance to issued, we write to ask the OMB to expedite its publication to our agencies so that we can do our jobs and help the thousands of people in our individual districts who need help.

Moving forward with this guidance will immediately roll back some of the red tape that prevents our federal government from quickly responding to the needs of the people we serve. Now more than ever, we cannot be asking people in need to complete unnecessary requirements before we can help them- we need to be focused on delivering solutions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Garret Graves', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Garret Graves
Member of Congress

cc: Russell Vought, Acting Director, Office of Management and Budget