

**Subject:** FW: S. 2218 & impact of COVID on Iowa Marshallese community  
**Attachments:** Grassley FAS Medicaid 050520 AG.pdf

**From:** Verhoff, Geoff  
**Sent:** Wednesday, June 10, 2020 11:18 AM  
**To:**  
**Subject:** S. 2218 & impact of COVID on Iowa Marshallese community

Zach –

I hope you are well. I wanted to contact you to follow up from a letter that H.E. Gerald Zackios, Ambassador of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), sent to the Senator.

There have been more than 350 cases of COVID-19 in the Marshallese community in the US and at least 20 fatalities. In Iowa, COVID-19 has proven to be especially deadly, with 12 deaths resulting from 19 illnesses. As you know, the RMI is a former U.S. territory and remains one of our strongest allies.

Under the US-RMI Compact of Free Association, the U.S. has complete authority over the RMI's national security and defense. We operate a ballistic missile defense test site on the RMI's Kwajalein Atoll and control the access of other nations to valuable RMI land and water rights. Marshallese citizens serve in the U.S. armed forces.

The US-RMI Compact also includes RMI health resources. The federal Medicaid program covered Marshallese living in the US until 1996, when a federal law intending to end Medicaid eligibility for non-US citizen immigrants ended up including Marshallese even though they are considered non-immigrants under the Compact.

This lack of federal Medicaid coverage is now having a profound impact on the small but significant US Marshallese community. The House has included a provision to fix this problem in the HEROES Act. There is also a Senate bill (S. 2218).

I'm interested to see if this is something you think that Senator Grassley can weigh in on and possibly co-sponsor.

Appreciate, as always, your willingness to listen!

Geoff

**Geoff K. Verhoff**  
**AKIN GUMP STRAUSS HAUER & FELD LLP**

2001 K Street N.W. | Washington, DC 20006 | USA | Direct: [+1 202.416.5012](tel:+12024165012) | Internal: [25012](tel:25012)  
Mobile: [+1 202.320.9461](tel:+12023209461) | [gverhoff@akingump.com](mailto:gverhoff@akingump.com) | [akingump.com](http://akingump.com) | [Bio](#)



**EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS**

2433 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.,

Washington, D.C. 20008

Tel. # (202) 234-5414 \* Fax # (202) 232-3236 \* E-mail: [info@rmiembassyus.org](mailto:info@rmiembassyus.org)

May 5, 2020

The Honorable Charles Grassley  
U.S. Senate  
135 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington DC, 20510

Dear Senator Grassley,

In this time of great need, I am writing to seek your support for the Covering our FAS Allies Act (S. 2218) and to include related language to reinstate Medicaid coverage for U.S.-based citizens of the Freely Associated States (FAS) in upcoming COVID-19 pandemic legislation.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is proud of our special and unique relationship with the United States. Through our Compact of Free Association, the U.S. has full authority and responsibility for RMI national security and operates the preeminent Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site on our Kwajalein Atoll.

Our Compact also permits Marshallese citizens to work, live, and study in the United States without a visa, as legal nonimmigrants. Our young men and women serve in the U.S. military, volunteering at per capita rates higher than many U.S. states.


In 1996, Congress passed sweeping welfare reform legislation that had the unintended effect of ending Medicaid eligibility for Marshallese citizens legally residing in the U.S. under the terms of our Compact. This omission is having serious consequences today. To date, there are 60 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our Marshallese communities throughout the United States, including Iowa. Six of these have succumbed to the illness.

As the U.S. and RMI confront the global pandemic as allies, it is important that our people have the resources to treat the COVID-19 virus and stop its spread. The danger we face today has exposed the serious consequences of omitting U.S. based citizens from the Republic of the Marshall Islands (and our fellow Freely Associated States of Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia) from the federal Medicaid program.

Our reinstatement in the federal Medicaid program is critical not just from a public health perspective but also as a basic matter of diplomacy to honor the terms and spirit of our Compact.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Gerald M. Zackios  
Ambassador