

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 28, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President of the United States
Chair, White House Coronavirus Task Force
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Vice President Pence and Secretary Azar,

We write today with concerns regarding Administration’s testing objectives for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), and to appeal for an aggressive, detailed testing strategy. Because research has shown that a significant portion of individuals with COVID-19 are asymptomatic,¹ widespread testing will be especially critical to quickly identify and contain small outbreaks as states gradually relax their respective stay-at-home orders.

On April 16, President Trump released the Guidelines for Opening Up America Again.² During a press briefing on April 17, Vice President Pence claimed that “states today have enough tests to implement the criteria of phase one if they choose to do so.”³ At another briefing on April 18, President Trump reiterated this, stating that the country’s testing “capability and capacity is fully sufficient to begin opening up the country totally.”⁴ On April 19, Vice President Pence again stated that testing capacity was sufficient for “any state in America to move into phase one.”⁵

We were perplexed to hear these claims, given that health care providers and patients in our districts continue to tell us about testing shortages. The two testing criteria proposed by your Guidelines fail to acknowledge these urgent needs. The first indicates that hospitals should have a “robust testing program in place for at-risk healthcare workers,” but does not provide specific metrics to indicate what programs meet this criterion. The second would require a “downward trajectory of positive tests as a percent of total tests within a 14-day period” based on a flat or increasing volume of tests. However, there is broad consensus among public health experts that current testing volume is insufficient. The Guidelines should acknowledge the need for increased testing volume nationwide and provide specific metrics such as frequency or volume to indicate that a hospital testing program is robust.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html#studies>

² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>

³ https://www.cnn.com/world/live-news/coronavirus-pandemic-intl-04-17-20/h_f7368486cb6231277beffd583b91bb55

⁴ <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/493543-maryland-governor-absolutely-false-for-trump-to-say-states-have-testing>

⁵ <https://video.foxnews.com/v/6150597090001#sp=show-clips>

Similarly, the strategic testing plan you will submit to Congress – as required under the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act – must also be detailed and aggressive. The federal government must not relent in pursuing the greatest testing capacity possible, particularly with regards to supporting American manufacturing. As production capacity increases, we also urge you to prevent the underutilization that some laboratories have recently experienced.⁶ In particular, the Administration should continually evolve testing guidelines to leverage available resources and coordinate with laboratories and manufacturers to inform health care providers where untapped resources exist.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request and your efforts to protect the public health while rebuilding the economy. These two goals are not mutually exclusive – in fact, they are inextricably linked.

Sincerely,



MIKE LEVIN
Member of Congress

/s/
JOYCE BEATTY
Member of Congress

/s/
ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
Member of Congress

/s/
SCOTT PETERS
Member of Congress

/s/
ADRIANO ESPAILLAT
Member of Congress

/s/
JAMES P. MCGOVERN
Member of Congress

/s/
DONALD S. BEYER JR.
Member of Congress

/s/
GRACE F. NAPOLITANO
Member of Congress

/s/
JIM HIMES
Member of Congress

/s/
JARED HUFFMAN
Member of Congress

/s/
MARK POCAN
Member of Congress

/s/
SUSAN A. DAVIS
Member of Congress

/s/
ALAN LOWENTHAL
Member of Congress

⁶ <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/14/coronavirus-testing-delays-186883>

/s/

MARCY KAPTUR
Member of Congress

/s/

RAÚL GRIJALVA
Member of Congress

/s/

SHEILA JACKSON LEE
Member of Congress