

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 29, 2020

Director Robert R. Redfield
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
1600 Clifton Road,
Atlanta, GA 30329

Secretary Alex M. Azar II
Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
200 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, D.C., 20201

Vice President Mike Pence
White House Coronavirus Task Force
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20502

Adm. Brett P. Giroir, M.D.
Assistant Secretary for Health, HHS
Testing Czar, White House Coronavirus Task Force
Washington, D.C.

Dear Director Redfield, Secretary Azar, Adm. Giroir, and Vice President Pence:

Until a vaccine or viable treatment strategy is developed, ongoing testing, isolation, monitoring, and contact tracing is necessary to contain the epidemic, prevent future spikes, and reopen the economy. Despite the surge in private lab capacity and work by our local public health professionals, we have not built up sufficient testing and contact tracing capabilities to adequately manage the novel coronavirus.

The actual number of Americans who have been exposed to or infected with the coronavirus is unknown because of the insufficient testing infrastructure. Testing not only allows for diagnosis and treatment, but also establishes how widespread a virus is. When public health experts know the size of the problem, they can analyze the rate at which people are hospitalized or die, and can follow its movements, making recommendations to policymakers on best management practices.ⁱ CDC does not publicly share comprehensive testing data despite the requirement in Families First Coronavirus Response Act that gave CDC access to that data.ⁱⁱ Instead, Americans, including policymakers, are relying on the volunteer heroism of The COVID Tracking Project to access daily testing information, rather than the appropriate primary source, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.ⁱⁱⁱ

Of those who do get tested for the coronavirus in the United States, nearly one in five people is found to have it. The U.S. therefore has a “test-positivity rate” of nearly twenty percent.^{iv} When compared to other infectious diseases, hypothetically a managed COVID-19 might look like a test-positivity rate around one percent. Other countries are managing COVID more effectively. For example, South Korea has a positivity rate of around two percent.^v Enough testing is necessary to reach a lower test positivity rate that manages COVID-19 and prevents epidemic spread. For a sense of scale, we have performed around 5 million tests to date in total, but at our current rate of confirmed cases, we would need to have run more than 70 million tests.^{vi} Some experts argue that we should currently run up to 20 million tests a day, not 200,000.^{vii} Given the sheer scale of testing needed, only the federal government has the means to incentivize increased production of diagnostic tests, swabs, reagents and other elements necessary to meet this scale while also controlling the supply chain.^{viii} Reagents, swabs, personal protective equipment, and testing kits are all in short supply.

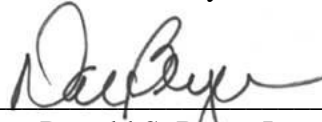
Data from Wuhan, China showed that social distancing alone could not bring the virus' spread rate low enough to lift the restrictions.^{ix} In order to manage COVID-19 and reopen the economy, we must reduce the epidemic to case-based management which requires increased testing and contact tracing. Sufficient public health infrastructure to contact trace makes it possible to proactively identify cases, identify contacts, and follow up on those contacts. We currently do not have enough staff in public health departments to do contact tracing. Right now, our system is unable to contact trace for every confirmed positive test result, much less every diagnosed case.^x Former CDC Director Thomas R. Frieden recommended “an army” of 300,000 contact tracers for the whole country, comparing it to the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps.^{xi} Massachusetts and San Francisco themselves have set up pilot contact tracing programs.^{xii} Other countries found more success when incorporating digital surveillance as a component of their contact tracing regime.^{xiii} Google and Apple announced plans to help trace coronavirus exposure risks, but not much clarity has been provided since.^{xiv}

Given these considerations, we request the following responses by May 13, 2020:

- We request that daily updates on the number of individuals being tested from all public and private lab infrastructure, including a breakdown between antibody testing and active coronavirus testing.
- Congressional legislation has repeatedly allocated funding for surveillance and testing to the CDC, can you please indicate state and insular area allocations for funding and what that money is being used for and in what amounts?
- How many diagnostic tests have you identified are needed daily to consider COVID-19 managed? When do you expect we will be without the need for CDC guidelines for who can be tested?
- Do you have a system for people diagnosed but not tested or those who self-identify for COVID-19 so they can be updated on antibody testing? What information are you providing to the public on antibody tests, specifically those that the FDA waived quality assurance on?
- Do you have a national surveillance strategy? How do you plan to conduct surveillance? Is there a plan to focus on certain populations that are disproportionately impacted like those in elder care facilities?
- What information and reporting standards are being developed to more effectively collect data?
- What is being done to incentivize domestic manufacturing of testing supplies? How is Congress being updated on this information and how frequently can we expect to be updated?
- What is being done to address the supply chain issues that inhibit increased testing capacity?
- What guidance is being given to hospitals to share with COVID-19 diagnosed, but not tested patients? Or for providers to share with those who are caring for COVID-19 discharge patients?
- Director Redfield previously noted that it was “premature” to say how CDC would expand contact tracing, but that planning was “far along.” What is CDC’s contact tracing strategy, beyond just funding allocations?
- Can you provide the number of contact tracers the United States currently has?

- Is there a federal plan to help expedite training for new contact tracers, beyond funding to local jurisdictions?
- What communication has this Administration had with Google and Apple about digital contact tracing and what is being done without private industry to look at digital contact tracing infrastructure?

Sincerely,



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Bill Foster
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
John B. Larson
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Susan A. Davis
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Lucy McBath
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

/s/ _____
Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

/s/

Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress

/s/

Tim Ryan
Member of Congress

/s/

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

/s/

Donna E. Shalala
Member of Congress

/s/

Jason Crow
Member of Congress

/s/

Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress

/s/

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

/s/

Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress

/s/

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

/s/

Al Green
Member of Congress

/s/

Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress

/s/

Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

/s/

Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress

/s/

Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress

/s/

David Trone
Member of Congress

/s/

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

/s/

Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress

/s/

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

/s/

Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

/s/

David E. Price
Member of Congress

/s/

Val Demings
Member of Congress

/s/
Katie Porter
Member of Congress

/s/
Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

/s/
Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/
Angie Craig
Member of Congress

/s/
André Carson
Member of Congress

/s/
Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

/s/
Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

/s/
Jim Cooper
Member of Congress

/s/
Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

/s/
Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Member of Congress

/s/
Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress

/s/
Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress

/s/
Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress

/s/
Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

/s/
Judy Chu
Member of Congress

/s/
Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

/s/
Kendra S. Horn
Member of Congress

/s/
Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress

/s/
Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress

/s/
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress

/s/
Albio Sires
Member of Congress

/s/
Dean Phillips
Member of Congress

/s/
Karen Bass
Member of Congress

/s/
Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

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