

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 10, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Azar,

As the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic intensifies throughout the United States, we have become increasingly concerned by the effect that supply shortages are having on patients and those charged with caring for them. To minimize these shortages, we request that you expeditiously issue a guaranteed order for materials identified as necessary to combat COVID-19.

We appreciate your efforts to increase the supply of N95 respirators by issuing a guaranteed order to manufacturers in March. Not only will this order reduce supply shortages for the current crisis, but it will help replenish the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) and stimulate our economy through domestic manufacturing. A study of the demand for N95s during a hypothetical influenza pandemic estimated that, in the most optimistic scenario, 3.5 billion N95s could be required for health care personnel and patients.¹ We thus request that you increase your order to meet this potential need.

We strongly urge you to issue similar guaranteed orders for other supplies critical to addressing COVID-19 and commit to replenishing the SNS with any leftover supplies once the crisis ebbs. Guaranteed orders from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) serve as an important signal to private industry that a buyer exists. This in turn incentivizes manufacturers to dramatically ramp up production, secure in the knowledge that they will be able to sell their products even if there is a surplus. The orders placed must be enough to incite companies to manufacture these supplies, meet the needs to address this unpredictable pandemic, and contribute toward restocking the SNS. In addition to employing the Defense Production Act to increase supplies, guaranteed purchase orders should be used to incentivize companies to respond to demand.

The following materials are necessary to protect health care workers from infection, provide appropriate care to patients, conduct adequate testing, and support facilities. Based on public

¹ Carias, C. et al. "Potential demand for respirators and surgical masks during a hypothetical influenza pandemic in the United States." <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25878300>

reporting and requests from states and localities, we believe that HHS should issue production orders for no fewer than the quantities below. Where estimates are not provided, we request that HHS exercise its discretion to issue orders to best meet communities' needs. Additional demand may also result as the pandemic develops.

Health Care Provider Safety

The United States currently has over 240,000 cases of COVID-19, double the number of cases of just six days ago.² Rates are skyrocketing and show no sign of slowing. At this critical juncture, it is imperative that we equip our nation's health care personnel with the tools they need to address this crisis. A recent report shows that 20% of healthcare professionals in Italy contracted COVID-19.³ Hundreds of hospital workers in New York City alone have already been infected, and health care workers in Georgia and New York have died. It is unacceptable that medical personnel are being told to reuse protective equipment or are forced to improvise their own from garbage bags or bandanas. On top of the grueling hours and overwhelming caseloads, health care workers should not also be forced to risk their personal safety to treat patients. As such, we believe guaranteed purchase orders for the following items should be issued:

- N95 respirators - 3,000,000,000
- Goggles - 100,000
- Face shields - 20,000,000
- Medical gowns- 20,000,000
- Aprons - 10,000,000
- PPE coveralls - 10,000,000
- Medical exam gloves - 500,000,000 pairs
- Surgical masks - 50,000,000

Patient Care

While most COVID-19 infections are not severe, a study of Seattle-area hospitals found that 75% of patients admitted for COVID-19 required mechanical ventilation.⁴ Hospitals are not equipped to respond to this need, and some have made plans to use alternatives, including positive airway pressure machines (CPAPs), which can dangerously aerosolize the virus, and bag valve masks, which must be pumped manually. Tragically, some localities have had to develop triage guidelines in the event of a shortage to determine which patients will receive a ventilator and which will not. In addition to ventilators, sterilization and disinfecting equipment is vital to reduce the spread of the virus. A new study indicates that N95 masks can be safely reused after

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC]. "Cases in U.S." <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html>

³ Remuzzi, A. & Remuzzi, G. "COVID-19 and Italy: what next?" [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30627-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30627-9/fulltext)

⁴ Bhatraju, P. et al. "Covid-19 in Critically Ill Patients in the Seattle Region — Case Series." <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa2004500>

being sterilized.⁵ As such, we believe guaranteed purchase orders for the following items should be issued:

- Ventilators - 200,000
- Single-use ventilation tubes
- Sterilizing and disinfecting equipment and materials

Testing

Robust COVID-19 testing is imperative to track new cases of the disease, know where resources must be directed, and understand the efficacy of preventive measures. Since January, only roughly 182,000 tests have been completed; far too few in a nation of 327 million, where many symptomatic individuals and exposed health care workers are ineligible to learn whether they have been infected.⁶ Testing supplies must be procured to meet the urgent demand. As such, we believe guaranteed purchase orders for the following items should be issued to address immediate testing needs:

- Nasopharyngeal swabs
- Viral transport media
- RNA testing kits
- Reagents

Rapid testing that can be conducted at the point-of-care should be prioritized; people should not have to wait up to a week to learn if they have been infected by the virus. As testing evolves, HHS should prioritize purchasing more efficient testing methods that can process samples quickly and accurately. These would also contribute to our future readiness through inclusion in the SNS.

- Rapid testing devices

Other Items for Facilities

Patients are quickly outnumbering beds at hospitals, leaving cities to convert convention centers and parks into care facilities. Additional resources are needed to equip those field hospitals, as well as protect health care workers in all settings from infection. As such, we believe guaranteed purchase orders for the following items should be issued:

- Beds - 100,000

⁵ Preidt, R. "N95 Face Masks Can Be Sterilized and Re-Used, Studies Show." <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2020-03-30/n95-face-masks-can-be-sterilized-and-re-used-studies-show>

⁶ CDC. "Testing in U.S." <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/testing-in-us.html>

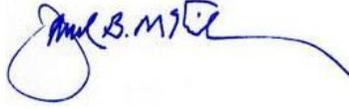
- Body bags - 250,000

Thank you for your urgent consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



David Trone
Member of Congress



David B. McKinley P.E.
Member of Congress

/s/

Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/

Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress

/s/

André Carson
Member of Congress

/s/

TJ Cox
Member of Congress

/s/

Angie Craig
Member of Congress

/s/

Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress

/s/

Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress

/s/

Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress

/s/

Anthony Gonzalez
Member of Congress

/s/

Vicky Hartzler
Member of Congress

/s/

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

/s/

Denny Heck
Member of Congress

/s/

Dusty Johnson
Member of Congress

/s/

Conor Lamb
Member of Congress

/s/

Mike Levin
Member of Congress

/s/

Ben McAdams
Member of Congress

/s/

Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress

/s/

Katie Porter
Member of Congress

/s/

C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress

/s/

Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress

/s/

Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress

/s/

Glenn "GT" Thompson
Member of Congress

/s/

Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress

/s/

Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress

/s/

Chris Pappas
Member of Congress

/s/

Harley Rouda
Member of Congress

/s/

Tim Ryan
Member of Congress

/s/

Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress

/s/

Darren Soto
Member of Congress

/s/

Susan Wild
Member of Congress