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United States Senate

March 16, 2020

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The Honorable Robert R. Redfield
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta GA, 303029

The Honorable Brett Giroir
Assistant Secretary for Health
Department of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington DC 25000

Dear Director Redfield, Assistant Secretary Giroir, and Vice President Pence,

I write regarding growing concerns about the lack of transparency from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the White House task force concerning U.S. testing capacity for COVID-19. The American people must receive truthful and accurate information about this pandemic, especially information about the federal government's plan to ensure the availability of coronavirus testing for every American who needs it.

Unfortunately, the Administration has been sending conflicting messages to the American people about current testing capacity. On March 6, 2020, at an event held at the CDC in Atlanta, President Trump claimed that "[a]nybody that wants a test can get a test."¹ This directly contradicted widespread reporting from medical professionals on the ground, and necessitated a

¹ Noah Weiland, *Anyone Who Wants a Coronavirus Test Can Have One, Trump Says. Not Quite, Says His Administration.*, N.Y. Times (March 7, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/07/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-messaging.html>.

correction by Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex M. Azar II: “You may not get a test unless a doctor or public health official prescribes a test.”²

On March 10, 2020, Vice President Pence said that “[a] million tests are in the field.”³ But according to reports, as of March 11, 2020, the U.S. had conducted only approximately 7,000 tests.⁴ Then, on March 12, 2020, Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, told the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Reform that our current system “is not really geared toward what we need right now” to address this pandemic, and he referred to our testing capacity as “a failing.”⁵ Just yesterday, Vice President Pence and Admiral Giroir announced that testing sites around the country will open, with a capacity of 4000 tests a day, and that 2 million tests will be available this week.⁶ While I hope this is true, we’ve heard similar promises from this Administration with only limited increases in capacity on the ground.

These conflicting messages are not only confusing, but dangerous. Defeating this outbreak requires us to have a testing-capacity plan and a supply chain that can meet demands. That begins with transparency for the American public on our actual testing capacity, using consistent metrics that allow for actual analysis.

Therefore, I call on the CDC and the White House task force to provide a daily update on the number of COVID-19 tests actually conducted each day, as well as the daily projected testing capacity in the United States. I also request that, as soon as practicable, the task force publish its testing plans, including a projection of the number of tests that will be available this week, in one week, three weeks, and six weeks. Absent these clear metrics and goals, we will be unable to evaluate whether we are making progress to achieving the testing capacity we need.

Those affected by COVID-19 must not be left in the dark about the government’s ability to effectively test presumptive patients for COVID-19. The CDC and the White House need to bolster public confidence in the federal government’s ability to combat COVID-19. That can begin with providing the American people an accurate depiction of the nation’s capability to test for COVID-19.

² *Id.*

³ Press Briefing by Vice President Pence and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force, The White House (Mar. 10 2020), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/press-briefing-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force/>.

⁴ Brian Resnick and Dylan Scott, *America’s shamefully slow coronavirus testing threatens all of us*, Vox (Mar. 12, 2020), <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2020/3/12/21175034/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-usa>; Max Roser, et al., *Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) – Statistics and Research*, OurWorldInData.org, <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus> (last updated Mar. 14, 2020).

⁵ Thomas M. Burton et al., *U.S. Virus Testing System Is Failing, Fauci Tells Congress*, Wall Street J. (Mar. 12, 2020), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-virus-testing-system-is-failing-fauci-tells-congress-11584042312>.

⁶ Roberta Rampton and Bobby Allyn, *White House Says Up To 4,000 Coronavirus Tests A Day To Start This Week*, NPR (Mar. 15, 2020), <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/15/816117889/white-house-to-give-update-on-how-to-get-tested-for-coronavirus>.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward J. Markey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "E" and "M".

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator