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March 19, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pence
The Vice President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Vice President:

I am writing to bring to your attention, in your capacity as the Chair of the Coronavirus Task Force, my request that the White House immediately appoint a senior Administration official to the Coronavirus Task Force specifically to oversee and coordinate the personal protective equipment (PPE) supply and distribution efforts. The appointment of such an official would provide to Governors, health care facilities, and health care workers a direct point of contact to the person who can direct critical equipment and supplies to the facilities and workers who need them most.

As you know, a growing number of nurses and other health care workers and first responders are unable to obtain the N95 respirators they need to evaluate and treat patients with suspected and confirmed COVID-19—or in some cases, even surgical masks. We are now learning that some hospitals have locked up existing respirators and personal protective equipment (PPE) and that they are not being made readily available to workers. In other facilities, there are reports of a dwindling supply of respirators and even rationing of surgical masks. In some cases, health care workers are being asked to make their own surgical masks out of office supplies.¹

The main problem the nation is facing in this area, however, is a lack of coordination for getting existing supplies to the health care workers most at risk from shortages in a timely manner. This situation threatens to quickly undermine our most important national resource in the fight against COVID-19—our front-line health care workforce.

¹ Hospital Workers Make Masks From Office Supplies Amid U.S. Shortage, Bloomberg (Mar. 17, 2020), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-18/hospital-makes-face-masks-covid-19-shields-from-office-supplies>.

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As of earlier this week, the Strategic National Stockpile still contained nearly 12 million respirators, according to officials with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response. However, these respirators are being rationed, and are often not getting to the facilities that are experiencing the greatest shortages in a timely manner. The procedures for acquiring the needed equipment are opaque and differ from state to state.

Meanwhile, there is no apparent coordination to ensure newly manufactured respirators and other equipment are being distributed to the highest priority areas as they become available. It is essential that this life-saving PPE is directed to the facilities most in need, and this requires a higher level of coordination than now exists.

Just as the President appointed Admiral Giroir to untangle the issue of access to testing, this critical problem requires dedicated leadership to ensure that respirators and other PPE are provided to health care facilities and health care workers. Without this kind of leadership our health care workers will be left unprotected, at risk, and unable to do their jobs, putting our entire public health system at risk.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT
Chairman



ALMA S. ADAMS, Ph.D.
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

cc: The Honorable Virginia Foxx, Ranking Member
cc: The Honorable Bradley Byrne, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Workforce Protections
cc: The Honorable Alex Azar, MD, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
cc: The Honorable Eugene Scalia, Secretary, Department of Labor
cc: The Honorable Jerome M. Adams, M.D., M.P.H., Surgeon General of the United States
cc: The Honorable Robert R. Redfield Jr., M.D., Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
cc: The Honorable Robert Kadlec, M.D., MTM&H, M.S., Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response
cc: The Honorable John Howard, MD, MPH, JD, LLM, MBA., Director, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health