

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

March 18, 2020

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

The Honorable Robert Kadlec  
Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar and Assistant Secretary Kadlec:

We write to you today requesting an update on the status of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's (MDPH) formal request for protective equipment from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS). Health care providers in the Commonwealth have been working around the clock to meet the urgent demands of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health emergency. We urge you to grant the request without delay.

On January 31, 2020, Massachusetts announced the first case of COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> Two presumptive positive cases were subsequently confirmed on March 2, 2020 and March 5, 2020.<sup>2</sup> Immediately, on March 5, 2020, MDPH requested protective equipment from the SNS to help them combat COVID-19 outbreaks in the state. Specifically, they requested 750,000 each of N95 Respirator Face Masks, Surgical Masks, Non-Sterile Gloves, Eye Protection, Powered Air Purifying Respirators, and Surgical Gowns.<sup>3</sup> However, according to state officials, the state has only received roughly 10% of the supplies they have requested.<sup>4</sup>

Since the request was submitted, the Commonwealth has declared a state of emergency,<sup>5</sup> and the number of confirmed cases has ballooned to over 200, with hundreds more under quarantine.<sup>6</sup> As these cases climb, Massachusetts hospitals are facing or are imminently

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Monica Bharel, MD, MPH, to Gary J. Kleinman, March 5, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Monica Bharel, MD, MPH, to Gary J. Kleinman, March 5, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Monica Bharel, MD, MPH, to Gary J. Kleinman, March 5, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Boston Herald, "Massachusetts hospitals face shortages of protective equipment in coronavirus outbreak," Lisa Kashinsky, March 14, 2020, <https://www.bostonherald.com/2020/03/14/massachusetts-hospitals-face-shortages-of-protective-equipment-in-coronavirus-outbreak/>.

<sup>5</sup> Mass.gov, "COVID-19 State of Emergency," <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-state-of-emergency>.

<sup>6</sup> Mass.gov, "COVID-19 Cases, Quarantine, and Monitoring," <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-cases-quarantine-and-monitoring>.

anticipating shortages of personal protective equipment needed to ensure that front line workers do not risk infection or contribute to the spread of COVID-19.<sup>7</sup> In some cases, Massachusetts hospitals are resorting to reusing N95 respirator masks in order to conserve their limited supplies.<sup>8</sup>

Protecting our frontline health care workers by providing personal protective equipment must be a top public health priority. To help Massachusetts continue combatting this public health crisis, we request an immediate response to the following questions:

1. When should Massachusetts expect to receive the full set of protective equipment from the SNS? Will Massachusetts be receiving this protective equipment in multiple shipments, or will they receive the equipment in a single shipment? What steps, if any, can Massachusetts take to expedite the delivery of protective equipment from the SNS?
2. Do you believe that the federal government should consider all options, such as using the *Defense Production Act* or initiating public manufacturing, to reduce shortages of personal protective equipment?
3. Has the Department of Health and Human Services identified additional private sector entities that can assist in providing or rapidly manufacturing personal protective equipment in Massachusetts and other states?
4. What other resources or recommendations are available to states that are facing shortages of personal protective equipment?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

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Richard E. Neal  
Member of Congress

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James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

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<sup>7</sup> Boston Herald, "Massachusetts hospitals face shortages of protective equipment in coronavirus outbreak," Lisa Kashinsky, March 14, 2020, <https://www.bostonherald.com/2020/03/14/massachusetts-hospitals-face-shortages-of-protective-equipment-in-coronavirus-outbreak/>.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Attorney General Maura Healey et al., to President Donald Trump, March 17, 2020, <https://www.mass.gov/doc/ag-letter-317/download>.

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Stephen Lynch  
Member of Congress

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William R. Keating  
Member of Congress

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Joseph P. Kennedy, III  
Member of Congress

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Katherine Clark  
Member of Congress

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Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress

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Ayanna Pressley  
Member of Congress

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Lori Trahan  
Member of Congress