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-19.1 Two presumptive positive cases were subsequently confirmed on March 2, 2020 and March 5, 2020.2 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.3 However, according to state officials, the state has only received roughly 10% of the supplies they have requested.4

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

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1 Letter from Monica Bharel, MD, MPH, to Gary J. Kleinman, March 5, 2020.  
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. In some cases, Massachusetts hospitals are resorting to reusing N95 respirator masks in order to conserve their limited supplies.8

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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Stephen Lynch
Member of Congress

William R. Keating
Member of Congress

Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress

Katherine Clark
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

Lori Trahan
Member of Congress