

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 25, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

We write to express our serious concern over the Trump Administration’s decision to terminate federal support of more than a dozen coronavirus testing sites at the end of June. This dangerous decision appears to follow the President’s instruction to “slow the testing down,” but it will only make it harder to stop the spread of the virus and save American lives. In light of the record-breaking surges in new infections across the United States—which come after the Administration pushed states to reopen last month—the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) must make every effort to ensure adequate testing capacity, especially in states hit hardest by the outbreak. The federal government should dramatically increase testing—not abandon testing centers.

On June 22, 2020, the Administration announced that its support for 13 community testing centers in Texas, Colorado, Illinois, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania will end on June 30.¹ This decision comes at a critical juncture in our country’s fight against the coronavirus. Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Dr. Anthony Fauci said earlier this week that the country is seeing a “disturbing surge” of new cases and “the next couple of weeks are going to be critical in our ability to address those surges.”² Yesterday’s total of more than 38,000 new cases in the United States in a single day was the highest total in the pandemic so far.³

Texas—where the Administration is withdrawing support from seven testing centers⁴—is currently experiencing one of the worst outbreaks in the country, with nearly 5,500 new cases and more than 4,000 hospitalizations reported on June 23. Despite pleas from local officials to

¹ *Feds About to Bail on Supporting COVID Testing Sites in Texas and Other States*, Talking Points Memo (June 23, 2020) (online at talkingpointsmemo.com/muckraker/exclusive-feds-about-to-bail-on-supporting-covid-testing-sites-in-texas-and-other-states).

² *Fauci, Top Health Officials Warn of COVID-19 Surge, Contradict Trump on Testing*, Washington Post (June 23, 2020) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/06/23/fauci-testimony-coronavirus-house/).

³ *New Coronavirus Cases in the U.S. Soar to Highest Single-day Total*, Washington Post (June 24, 2020) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/06/24/coronavirus-live-updates-us/).

⁴ *Feds About to Bail on Supporting COVID Testing Sites in Texas and Other States*, Talking Points Memo (June 23, 2020) (online at talkingpointsmemo.com/muckraker/exclusive-feds-about-to-bail-on-supporting-covid-testing-sites-in-texas-and-other-states).

maintain federal funding during the surge in cases, federal officials have refused to alter their closure plans.⁵ At least one testing center in Dallas has already announced it will be forced to close next week due to the loss in federal funding.⁶

The Administration's plan to end federal support for testing sites has drawn bipartisan criticism. Both of Texas's Republican Senators have called for the federal government to continue supporting these testing sites, with Senator Cornyn stating, "I believe that they need to extend that federal support in Texas, at least until we get this most recent uptick in cases addressed."⁷

HHS's announcement comes as President Trump has repeatedly expressed strong opposition to testing, stating at a recent political rally, "I said to my people, 'Slow the testing down please,'" and writing on Twitter: "Cases are going up in the U.S. because we are testing far more than any other country, and ever expanding. With smaller testing we would show fewer cases!"⁸ As the Select Subcommittee wrote to you earlier this week, no American should go untested because the President fears an accurate count of coronavirus infections.⁹

Public health experts have urged government officials for months to increase the number of coronavirus tests being conducted each day in order to detect outbreaks and control the spread.¹⁰ It is inexcusable that at this critical time, the United States federal government—the only entity with the resources, authority, and expertise to implement testing at the massive scale needed—is instead taking steps to slow testing down.

⁵ *As Dallas COVID Cases Rise, 2 of the City's Testing Sites Will Lose Federal Funds*, Fort Worth Star-Telegram (June 24, 2020) (online at www.star-telegram.com/news/local/dallas/article243746952.html); *Local Leaders Beg for Help from Trump Administration as FEMA Funding for 4 Houston-Area Testing Centers to End June 30*, KPRC (June 24, 2020) (online at www.click2houston.com/news/local/2020/06/24/local-leaders-beg-for-help-from-trump-administration-as-fema-funding-for-4-houston-area-testing-centers-to-end-june-30/).

⁶ *As Dallas COVID Cases Rise, 2 of the City's Testing Sites Will Lose Federal Funds*, Fort Worth Star-Telegram (June 24, 2020) (online at www.star-telegram.com/news/local/dallas/article243746952.html).

⁷ *Coronavirus: Federal Government Will End Funding for 13 Community-based COVID-19 Test Sites, Most in Texas*, CNBC (June 24, 2020) (online at www.cnbc.com/2020/06/24/coronavirus-federal-government-to-end-funding-some-covid-19-test-sites.html).

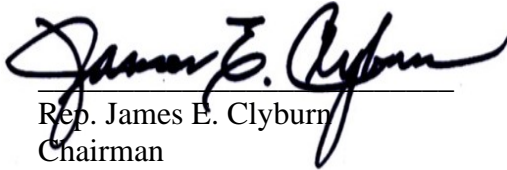
⁸ *Trump Says He Wasn't Joking About Testing Slowdown: "I Don't Kid"*, CBS News (June 23, 2020) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-slow-down-testing-coronavirus-i-dont-kid/); Donald J. Trump, *Twitter* (June 23, 2020) (online at <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1275381670561095682>); *Trump on Coronavirus: 'If We Stop Testing Right Now, We'd Have Very Few Cases, If Any'*, The Hill (June 15, 2020) (online at thehill.com/policy/healthcare/502819-trump-on-coronavirus-if-we-stop-testing-right-now-wed-have-very-few-cases); *Trump: Coronavirus Testing May Be 'Overrated' and Reason for High U.S. Case Count*, Politico (May 14, 2020) (online at www.politico.com/news/2020/05/14/trump-coronavirus-testing-high-case-numbers-259524).

⁹ Letter from Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, to Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex M. Azar II, and Dr. Robert R. Redfield, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (June 22, 2020) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/2020-06-22.Clyburn%20to%20Task%20Force%20re%20Testing.pdf>).

¹⁰ *Public Health Experts Warn the U.S. Lacks Resources to Contain the Coronavirus*, National Public Radio (June 18, 2020) (online at www.npr.org/2020/06/18/880513711/public-health-experts-warn-the-u-s-lacks-resources-to-contain-the-coronavirus).

We urge you to immediately reverse this devastating decision and to quickly and efficiently ensure that all communities have the federal resources they need to conduct robust coronavirus testing.

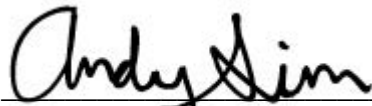
Sincerely,



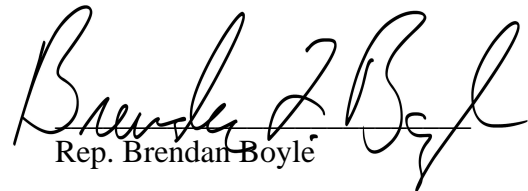
Rep. James E. Clyburn
Chairman
Select Subcommittee on the
Coronavirus Crisis



Rep. Bill Foster
Member
Select Subcommittee on the
Coronavirus Crisis



Rep. Andy Kim
Member
Select Committee on the
Coronavirus Crisis



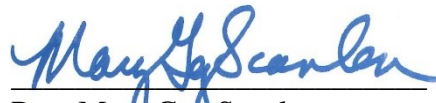
Rep. Brendan Boyle



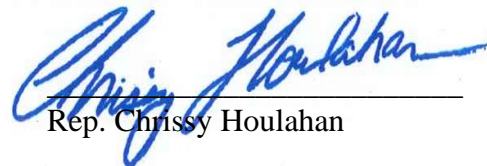
Rep. Dwight Evans



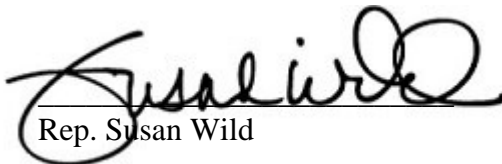
Rep. Madeleine Dean



Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon



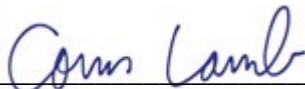
Rep. Chrissy Houlahan



Rep. Susan Wild



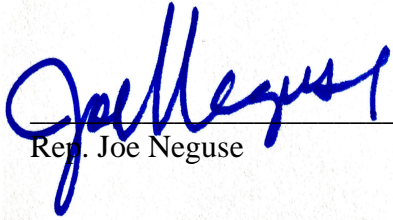
Rep. Matt Cartwright



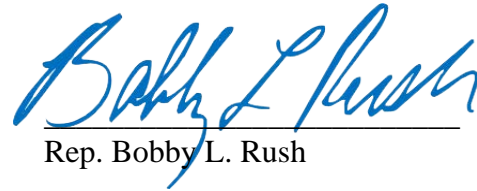
Rep. Conor Lamb



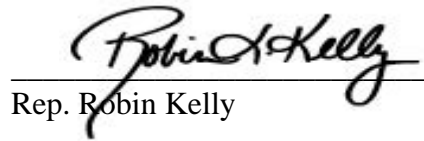
Rep. Mike Doyle



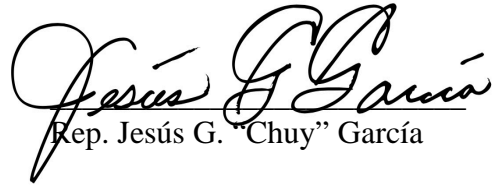
Rep. Joe Neguse



Rep. Bobby L. Rush



Rep. Robin Kelly



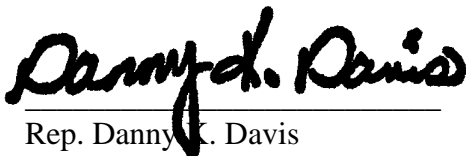
Rep. Jesús G. "Chuy" García



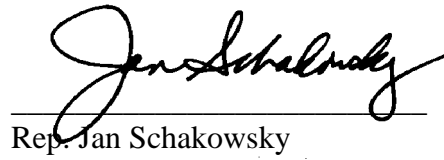
Rep. Mike Quigley



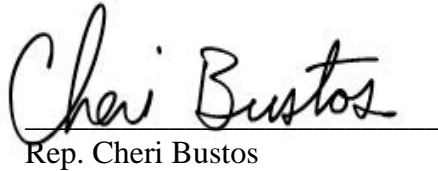
Rep. Sean Casten



Rep. Danny K. Davis



Rep. Jan Schakowsky



Rep. Cheri Bustos



Rep. Josh Gottheimer



Rep. Tom Malinowski



Rep. Mikie Sherrill



Rep. Lizzie Fletcher



Rep. Al Green



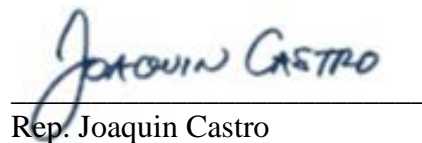
Rep. Vicente Gonzalez



Rep. Veronica Escobar

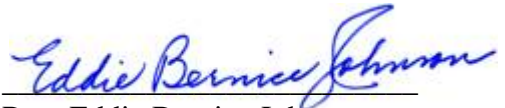


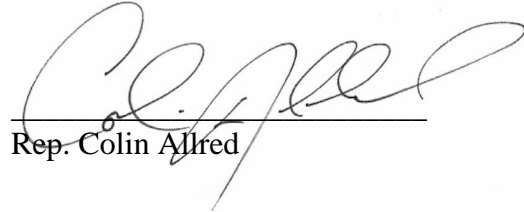
Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee

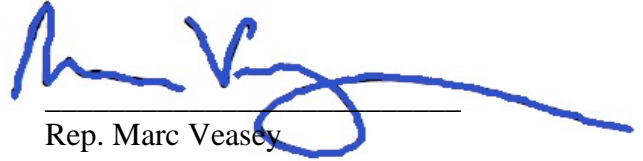


Rep. Joaquin Castro

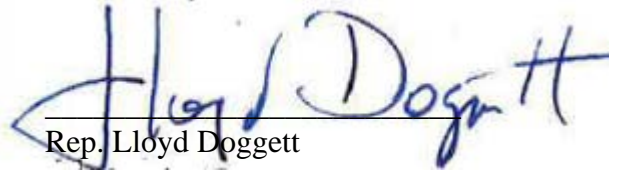

Rep. Sylvia Garcia

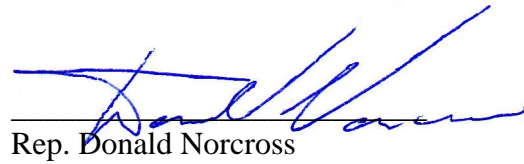

Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson


Rep. Colin Allred


Rep. Marc Veasey


Rep. Filemon Vela


Rep. Lloyd Doggett


Rep. Donald Norcross

cc: The Honorable Steve Scalise, Ranking Member
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis