

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 2, 2020

The Honorable Peter T. Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency
Management Agency
500 C St. SW
Washington, D.C. 20024

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
Department of Health and
Human Services
330 C St. SW
Washington, D.C. 20416

Dear Administrator Gaynor and Secretary Azar:

We write to you today regarding COVID-19 testing for Houston and Harris County. There are currently four public testing sites total for a metro area with a population of just under seven million people—a population total greater than 26 states. The City of Houston operates two of these four public test sites, while Harris County operates the other two. All four sites are wholly dependent on support from FEMA-sourced supplies as a private market does not currently exist at sustainable levels for the scope of testing needs.

Even with FEMA-procured kits and supplies, the County can only conduct 1,000 tests each day because of the limited supplies. In comparison to other large metro regions, these numbers are woefully inadequate to provide the testing needed to support public health in the region. The lack of testing means that the number of infected individuals is certainly being underestimated and those people could be unknowingly transmitting the virus to others.

President Trump said earlier this week that a lack of kits is no longer a problem and that over one million people in the U.S. have been tested. But according to the Texas Department of State Health Services, only around 43,000 tests have been conducted in Texas and the results of these tests can take up to 10 days to receive. We are hearing on the ground from our local officials that they no longer have enough supplies to keep up with the testing needs in the area. To combat this virus, we need exponentially more tests and resources for labs who are processing these tests in order to speed up the results. We can only flatten the curve if we truly know the number of cases in our community.

Already, Harris County is reporting the most cases in Texas with 680 confirmed. And knowing that the rate of testing is still low, this number is likely much higher than that. That is why we request that you increase the number of test kits available to Houston and Harris County, and work to ensure that labs have the resources they need to process these tests in a timely manner.

This matter is of urgent concern to all of us in the Southeast Texas region, and we thank you for your prompt and fulsome response to our letter and to the great need in our region.

Sincerely,



Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress



Sylvia Garcia
Member of Congress



Al Green
Member of Congress