

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 17, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

We appreciate your efforts to address the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, and write to request swift federal assistance on urgent requests made by the State of Illinois for responding to this public health challenge.

On March 4, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) requested distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) from the federal Strategic National Stockpile (SNS). These masks, respirators, gloves, and gowns are essential equipment that our front-line hospital, community health center, and health care workers rely upon in treating patients who present with COVID-19 symptoms. To date, the State of Illinois had not received clear indications from the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response about when to expect the requested PPE from the SNS. And last week, the Chicago Department of Public Health was informed it was receiving only 25,000 N95 masks, a fraction of both the local need and the allotment it received of one million masks during the H1N1 outbreak. We request your immediate action to fulfill the state's PPE request to the greatest extent practicable and provide clear expectations to Illinois.

Further, the federal government's diagnostic testing response continues to pose an unacceptable challenge for Illinois. We appreciate the Food and Drug Administration's expeditious work to authorize new diagnostic platforms, identify alternate reagents, and explore flexibilities to boost clinical testing capacity. We also recognize Illinois was among the first states to obtain the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) test kit. However, Illinois is now facing shortfalls of the extraction reagent needed to conduct the testing, which is obtained through the CDC's ordering system. We request your assistance to ensure IDPH has a robust supply of test kit supplies and that the state's efforts to augment its testing capacity do not face regulatory delays.

Thank you for your Department's efforts to address the myriad challenges posed by this public health pandemic. We stand ready to work with your agencies to ensure Illinois' public health and health care needs in responding to COVID-19 are properly met.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator