

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 6, 2020

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

The Honorable Peter T. Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Secretary Azar and Administrator Gaynor,

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Arizona continues to rise and stress the capacity of healthcare professionals and frontline workers. Rising hospitalization numbers have strained licensed bed capacity across the state and Arizona hospitals have had to activate crisis standards of care plans. Relative to other epicenters, these metrics are indicative of dangerous trends in our state and the urgent need for an additional concentration of resources and support. We therefore ask the U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources (HHS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for an immediate influx of federal resources to combat the virus through increased testing, contact tracing, personal protective equipment (PPE), staffing support, and emergency funding for local initiatives to respond to and mitigate further spread. Further, we ask that coordination for distribution of resources be improved.

We appreciate the resources provided to Arizona as we deal with one of the worst outbreaks in the country, including rising number of cases amongst vulnerable tribal populations. In addition to providing over 360,000 swabs and 380,00 testing mediums, FEMA and HHS have coordinated dozens of community-based testing sites between federal, state and local, and retail partners, which have helped our frontline workers immensely up until this point. However existing drive-thru testing sites and the health care personnel at each location continue to be challenged by intense Arizona temperatures and overwhelming demand. Recent reports and conversations with our constituents have revealed alarming conditions, with many waiting in their cars for hours in order to be administered a test and sometimes weeks to receive a test result. We were pleased to learn about the opening of two new testing sites partially supported by federal resources at South Mountain Park and Maryvale High School that will provide up to 5,000 free diagnostic tests per day. We are respectfully requesting additional support to help increase Arizona's testing capacity through additional sites requested by the state, the City of Phoenix, and Pima County officials as well as increased capacity in retail and health facilities to alleviate the burdens on existing testing sites.

Ultimately, government officials, private stakeholders, and local communities can make more informed decisions when there is robust and timely data. The delay in processing test results harms the ability of contact tracers to track and isolate individuals exposed to the virus. We ask for

assistance in building up lab capacity and access to point-of-care tests, such as those being provided to Arizona long-term care facilities. Our community health centers could be activated to a much larger degree with proper federal supports, including additional PPE and testing supplies for their analyzers which remain commercially unavailable and limited through FDA allocations. These are resources that at this time only the federal government can provide in a timely and reliable manner. A stronger statewide contact tracing initiative would also help build capacity in our county public health departments, universities, and community organizations to sustain this important public health work beyond this pandemic.

As Arizona hospitals have had to activate surge capacity, staffing has become a serious problem. Even as our larger hospital systems bring in hundreds of medical personnel from outside Arizona, there remains a severe shortage of ICU nurses, respiratory therapists, and other essential personnel to staff the surge beds. We appreciate that over the last month HHS has sent nearly 100 National Disaster Medical System personnel to Arizona on two-week deployments at the request of state and local public health officials and hospitals. As you continue working with other hotspot states such as Louisiana, Texas, and Florida, we hope that Arizona receives full and appropriate consideration for requests made by Governor Doug Ducey, the Arizona Department of Health Services, and other Arizona hotspot communities for additional testing, contact tracing, staffing assistance.

Finally, we ask that you work with the state, Arizona Department of Health Services, and county health departments to establish a clearer, more responsive system to understand the needs of local providers and rapidly deploy resources. We have been made aware of requests for resources that go unanswered or are constantly rerouted. For instance, the Arizona Alliance of Community Health Centers maintains a log of PPE needs for health centers in the state, yet a HHS representative from outside the region contacted individual health centers to gauge their needs. We appreciate HHS's efforts in this regard, but there simply must be a clearer chain of command established. Perfecting this process before the convergence of flu season, and as supply scarcity once again increases, is vital.

Thank you again for your support and we look forward to continued dialogue. Our offices stand ready to being a resource going forward, and please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of more assistance.

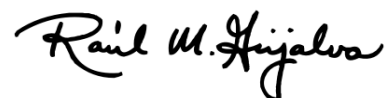
Sincerely,



Kyrsten Sinema
Senator



David Schweikert
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress



Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress