

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 27, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pence
Vice President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Vice President:

We write to you today regarding the need for a comprehensive, national strategy for COVID-19 testing, following enactment of the *Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act*, which invested \$25 billion in COVID-19 testing and called for a national testing strategy to increase domestic testing capacity, address disparities, and provide assistance and resources to States, localities, territories, and Tribes. Public health officials in Washington state and across the country require a strong testing system to get the information they need to determine when our states and communities can begin eventual reductions in social distancing efforts without compromising public health. As communities across the country need accurate information to make decisions about next steps, not having a coordinated evidence-based testing strategy is a recipe for disaster.

Communities in Washington state, as well as public health leaders, laboratories, hospitals, and health care workers on the ground, are concerned the current testing system is not strong enough to begin lifting social distancing requirements. Furthermore, experts anticipate we may need a minimum of 500,000 tests per day to effectively monitor and contain the virus.¹ Some estimates are much higher.² Currently, we are only running approximately 150,000 tests per day nationwide.³

That difference of roughly 350,000 tests daily is significant and concerning. A large portion of this shortfall stems from national shortages in supplies like swabs, reagent, transport media, and personal protective equipment health care providers and laboratorians need to obtain and handle samples; only the federal government is equipped to fully address that shortfall. Without those supplies, public health workers and health care providers cannot obtain the samples to utilize the full laboratory capacity in Washington state. For example, Governor Inslee detailed recently that Washington state is working to obtain 2.5 million test collection kits to support our public health

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/17/us/coronavirus-testing-states.html>

² https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TheRockefellerFoundation_WhitePaper_Covid19_4_22_2020.pdf

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/17/us/coronavirus-testing-states.html>

officials and health care workers in the response, but has thus far been unable to find enough supply to meet those needs. We know our state is not alone in experiencing these barriers.

The country's ability to move forward hinges on resolving these bottlenecks in order to be able to administer widespread testing. While state and local leaders can and should lead the coordination of efforts to contain COVID-19 in their communities, they cannot resolve problems that demand national coordination. It is essential the federal government build and support a strong national testing system that resolves supply chain challenges, synthesizes epidemiological data at a national level, and provides states with support to increase testing capacity. Diseases do not respect borders and they do not respect state lines. For any state to effectively protect their citizens from COVID-19, every state must do so.

We urge the Administration to quickly issue a comprehensive strategic plan to address testing in the United States and move rapidly to build out this system.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress



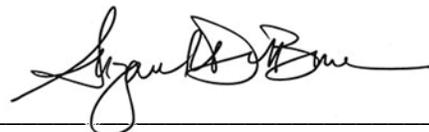
Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Adam Smith
Member of Congress



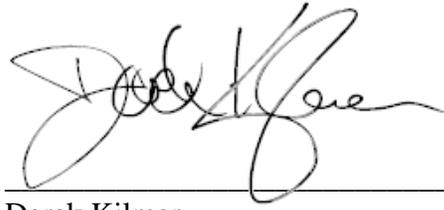
Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



Suzan DelBene
Member of Congress



Denny Heck
Member of Congress



Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
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