

Krahel, Kyle

From: Mee, Eric
Sent: Tuesday, April 28, 2020 10:48 AM
To: Mee, Eric
Subject: RELEASE: Rep. Mike Levin Leads Letter to Vice President and HHS Secretary Calling for Detailed, Aggressive National Testing Strategy



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, April 28, 2020

Contact: Eric.Mee@mail.house.gov

Rep. Mike Levin Leads Letter to Vice President and HHS Secretary Calling for Detailed, Aggressive National Testing Strategy

San Juan Capistrano, CA – Today, U.S. Representative Mike Levin (D-CA) [led a letter](#) with 15 of his House colleagues to Vice President Mike Pence and Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar calling for an aggressive, detailed COVID-19 national testing strategy, which experts agree is needed before communities can begin re-opening in a safe and effective manner. The letter points to several misleading statements made by President Trump and Vice President Pence about testing capacity across the country and highlights the lack of specific federal guidance needed to implement an effective testing strategy.

“We write today with concerns regarding Administration’s testing objectives for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), and to appeal for an aggressive, detailed testing strategy. Because research has shown that a significant portion of individuals with COVID-19 are asymptomatic, widespread testing will be especially critical to quickly identify and contain small outbreaks as states gradually relax their respective stay-at-home orders,” **wrote Levin and his colleagues.** “Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request and your efforts to protect the public health while rebuilding the economy. These two goals are not mutually exclusive – in fact, they are inextricably linked.

The latest coronavirus relief legislation – the *Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act* - states that HHS shall report to Congress on the strategic testing plan "not later than 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act." That plan is due no later than May 24, 2020.

Click [here](#) or see below for the full letter:

The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President of the United States
Chair, White House Coronavirus Task Force
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, D.C. 20500

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

Dear Vice President Pence and Secretary Azar,

We write today with concerns regarding Administration's testing objectives for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), and to appeal for an aggressive, detailed testing strategy. Because research has shown that a significant portion of individuals with COVID-19 are asymptomatic, widespread testing will be especially critical to quickly identify and contain small outbreaks as states gradually relax their respective stay-at-home orders.

On April 16, President Trump released the Guidelines for Opening Up America Again. During a press briefing on April 17, Vice President Pence claimed that "states today have enough tests to implement the criteria of phase one if they choose to do so." At another briefing on April 18, President Trump reiterated this, stating that the country's testing "capability and capacity is fully sufficient to begin opening up the country totally." On April 19, Vice President Pence again stated that testing capacity was sufficient for "any state in America to move into phase one."

We were perplexed to hear these claims, given that health care providers and patients in our districts continue to tell us about testing shortages. The two testing criteria proposed by your Guidelines fail to acknowledge these urgent needs. The first indicates that hospitals should have a "robust testing program in place for at-risk healthcare workers," but does not provide specific metrics to indicate what programs meet this criterion. The second would require a "downward trajectory of positive tests as a percent of total tests within a 14-day period" based on a flat or increasing volume of tests. However, there is broad consensus among public health experts that current testing volume is insufficient. The Guidelines should acknowledge the need for increased testing volume nationwide and provide specific metrics such as frequency or volume to indicate that a hospital testing program is robust.

Similarly, the strategic testing plan you will submit to Congress – as required under the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act – must also be detailed and aggressive. The federal government must not relent in pursuing the greatest testing capacity possible, particularly with regards to supporting American manufacturing. As production capacity increases, we also urge you to prevent the underutilization that some laboratories have recently experienced. In particular, the Administration should continually evolve testing guidelines to leverage available resources and coordinate with laboratories and manufacturers to inform health care providers where untapped resources exist.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request and your efforts to protect the public health while rebuilding the economy. These two goals are not mutually exclusive – in fact, they are inextricably linked.

Sincerely,

###