

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

March 31, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to convey the desperate need for personal protective equipment (PPE) in our communities across Illinois and to urge your Administration to immediately develop and implement a coordinated national response to protect our heroes working on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response.

Illinois and many other states face a life-threatening shortage of respirators, masks, protective eyewear, face shields, gloves, gowns, and other protective equipment. While we appreciate the partial approvals of our Governor's requests for PPE from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS), along with additional allocations to Chicago, we remain concerned these amounts cannot meet the alarming demand we see across Illinois. We continue to receive tearful phone calls from nurses who have worn the same single-use masks for five consecutive days while caring for patients with COVID-19. Our doctors are terrified that they might be spreading the virus to the very people they are trying to save.

Hundreds of retired health care providers in Illinois are answering the call to return to the workforce, yet we cannot equip them with the protection they need and deserve. Meanwhile, essential workers who cannot stay home are facing elevated risks of exposure without protection while filling prescriptions in pharmacies, stocking grocery store shelves, and keeping child care options available.

While we are encouraged by the entrepreneurial spirit that has been displayed as American businesses and families are stepping up to help with PPE production, these efforts cannot replace the strong federal leadership required by a public health crisis of this magnitude. Distressingly, though, leadership from your Administration in this area is falling short.

Illinois leaders, health care providers, and public health officials report weeks of unacceptable confusion and avoidable delays as they seek help from federal agencies with their PPE needs—which will only continue to grow as this crisis worsens. The transfer of responsibility of the SNS from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) underscores the continued confusion and lack of coordination. Recently, Rear Adm. John Polowczyk, the Navy official heading FEMA's PPE supply chain efforts, stated he is "blind to where all the product is."

We were pleased to see reports that the federal government is contacting medical distributors and parcel delivery services, along with coordinating international flights to augment supplies, but our constituents and local leaders still have no clarity, answers, or enough equipment. As part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Congress appropriated \$16 billion to replenish the PPE supply in the SNS. The federal government must act now to take the lead in implementing that funding to execute purchase orders; evaluating current PPE needs and anticipating new ones; sourcing supplies domestically and overseas; coordinating and compelling production, including through more robust implementation of the Defense Production Act authorities; and allocating and distributing resources to the areas of greatest need.

We urge you to immediately order the coordinated, full-scale deployment of every public and private resource our nation has to ensure that our doctors, nurses, EMS workers, and other heroes on the frontlines have the protective equipment they need. The safety of our communities and the lives of our neighbors depend on it, and Illinois cannot wait another day. We stand ready to work with you and the departments you lead to assist however we can.

Sincerely,

Lauren Underwood
Member of Congress

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

Sean Casten
Member of Congress

Bill Foster
Member of Congress

Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

Bradley S. Schneider
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress

Mike Quigley
Member of Congress

Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

Robin Kelly
Member of Congress