

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar,

We write on behalf of the thousands of our constituents who live, work, or have family members in nursing homes to emphasize the need for urgent action to protect residents from the COVID-19 outbreak. We urge you to take advantage of the authorities granted to you by the Defense Production Act to ensure that nursing homes receive enough personal protective equipment to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Nursing home residents and workers are especially vulnerable to the virus. In these settings, residents, families, and workers are in constant and intimate interaction, facilitating the virus's spread. One of the earliest and most deadly outbreaks of COVID-19 occurred in a Washington state nursing home. Since COVID-19 was identified in the facility, 2/3 of the residents have tested positive for the virus and 35 people have died. Dozens of the facility's workers have been diagnosed as well.¹

Personal protective equipment is essential to slowing the spread of the virus and preventing another tragedy on the scale of what occurred in Washington state. Unfortunately, nursing homes lack robust inventories of personal protective equipment. Worse still, supply chain practices prevent nursing homes from quickly restocking. When products go into shortage, distributors limit clients' orders based on the client's recent order history. Limiting nursing homes' ability to purchase based on their purchasing history puts too many residents and staffers at risk of infection.

The Defense Production Act authorizes you to incentivize the production of materials essential to the national defense and direct their allocation across the country. We urge you to invoke those authorities to increase production of personal protective equipment and improve information sharing among nursing homes, long-term care facilities, and distributors to ensure that nursing homes most at risk of a COVID-19 outbreak have prompt access to the necessary personal protective equipment they need to keep their residents and workers safe.

Thank you for your prompt attention to these matters.

Sincerely,



Abigail D. Spanberger



Denver Riggleman

¹ New York Times, The Coronavirus's Rampage Through a Suburban Nursing Home. March 21, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/21/us/coronavirus-nursing-home-kirkland-life-care.html>.

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