

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 13, 2020

Robert Redfield, MD
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Rd.
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Dr. Redfield,

Thank you for appearing before the House Committee on Oversight and Reform on March 12, 2020 and testifying on the Trump Administration's plan for the Coronavirus Disease 2019 ("COVID-19"). We appreciate you taking time during this global pandemic to answer many critical questions as we fulfill our constitutional duty to conduct oversight. As the coronavirus has spread rapidly through the United States in recent weeks, resulting in nearly 1,600 cases and over 41 deaths, we approached the hearing with serious concerns about the costs associated with testing and treatment for the novel coronavirus.¹ Given the stories of health care bills that result in thousands of dollars, Congress has been pressuring the Administration to cover all associated costs for un- and underinsured individuals.² Therefore, we were encouraged by your commitment, under oath, to ensure free testing and treatment to Americans and are writing to ensure that the agency follows through on that promise.

During the hearing, Congresswomen Porter and Pressley pressed you and the other witnesses present on several important issues, including both insurance coverage and government support for medical costs incurred by patients as a result of being tested and treated for COVID-19. You made clear that testing and treatment costs for COVID-19 would be covered for both the insured and the nearly 28 million uninsured Americans. During an exchange with Congresswoman Pressley you replied in the affirmative that all costs and treatment for the novel coronavirus would be covered. You later reaffirmed this response in a prolonged exchange with Congresswoman Porter when asked, pursuant to your existing authority under 42 CFR § 71.30 (82 FR 6975), if you would mandate that care and diagnostic testing be free for every American. Under oath, you committed to using your authority as Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to make diagnostic testing free for every American, regardless of insurance.

Undoubtedly, the commitments made regarding testing and treatment for COVID-19 will provide tremendous relief to millions of families who fear out-of-pocket expenses and as a result may forgo seeking out medical care or consulting with a doctor. Free testing will ensure we can mitigate the spread of this virus and protect the health and safety of our constituents. Before the Committee adjourned, you clarified your earlier response to Congresswoman Pressley stating "in my comments today I want to just clarify that we're currently examining all avenues to try to ensure that the uninsured have access to testing and treatment. We're encouraging the use of the

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/world/coronavirus-maps.html>

² <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/health-care/article240476806.html>

Federally Qualified Health Centers that can do this at reduced or free costs and we will continue to update both the Congress and the public on all available resources for this population.”³ It is the expectation of the undersigned that you not renege on this commitment and will instead use every tool available, specifically your authority as CDC Director, to ensure testing and treatment for COVID-19 is free and available for all Americans throughout this global public health crisis.

Furthermore, in a letter sent to Department of Health & Human Services Secretary Azar, Department of Labor Secretary Scalia, and Internal Revenue Services Commissioner Rettig on March 5, 2020, Congresswomen Porter, Rosa DeLauro and Lauren Underwood, asked your agency, in conjunction with the Department of Labor and the Internal Revenue Service, to use any existing authority to make diagnostic treatment and care free or affordable for every American, regardless of insurance type or status.⁴ This includes not just the uninsured, but those with all types of plans. The Congresswomen cited 82 FR 6975, as the existing authority, yet, there has been no response to date citing any statute that would preclude its use. Additionally, on March 11, 2020, Congressman Kennedy and Congresswoman Jayapal sent a letter to members of the COVID-19 taskforce to ensure that the 71.9 million people who are un- or under-insured would not be penalized due to no or inadequate health care coverage.⁵

While Congress works toward the passage of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act to codify free testing for every individual, it is imperative that you use your existing statutory authority to make the test and treatment free and accessible to all immediately. In the midst of global pandemic, fear of surprise medical bills and financial ruin will only lead to more devastation and harm to the global community. We must not allow health coverage, or lack thereof, to serve as a barrier to American’s ability to access healthcare. The health of our nation’s families and communities relies on the federal government’s leadership in making testing and treatment for COVID-19 free and accessible for all who need it. It is our expectation that you will remain committed to keeping the promises made during the March 12th hearing.

Please reach out with any questions to Jessica Seigel (jessica.seigel@mail.house.gov) in Rep. Porter’s office, Lynese Wallace (lynese.wallace@mail.house.gov) in Rep. Pressley’s office, Caitlin Peruccio (caitlin.peruccio@mail.house.gov) in Rep. DeLauro’s office, and Andrea Harris (andrea.harris@mail.house.gov) in Rep. Underwood’s office.

Sincerely,



KATIE PORTER
Member of Congress



AYANNA PRESSLEY
Member of Congress

³ <https://youtu.be/qoqnStj3hE4>

⁴ <https://delaware.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/delauro-porter-underwood-raise-concerns-about-covid-19-diagnostics-costs>

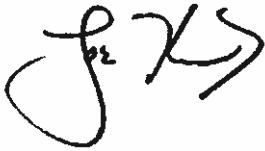
⁵ https://www.thedailybeast.com/democrats-demand-to-trump-cover-coronavirus-health-care-costs?via=twitter_page



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