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January 10, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

In the weeks since November 30, when your Administration identified the COVID-19 variant B.1.1.529 – now known as Omicron – as a “Variant of Concern,” public health officials and Americans have experienced the new variant’s rapid spread and ability to evade vaccination. I commend you for your Administration’s prompt response, including your further promotion of immunization, boosters, and efforts to protect our children while keeping schools open. Still, additional action is needed to best equip our communities to handle this variant. Several steps could be immediately beneficial, including: increasing rapid testing supplies; further utilization of the National Guard to expand COVID-19 testing; mobilizing FEMA strike teams to staff healthcare facilities in our hardest-hit communities; and, ensuring the widespread availability of cutting-edge COVID-19 treatments effective against the new variant.

Because of your leadership, efforts are underway to expand free at-home testing for Americans and to implement workplace protections to help ensure our economy remains open. These measures – coupled with the groundbreaking work of our life sciences industry to bring to market monoclonal antibody treatments, antiviral drugs, and other cutting-edge therapeutics – have resulted in the significantly stronger footing we now have to tackle the current wave of this pandemic.

Despite all this progress, I believe there are several additional steps your Administration can take to address the impact of the Omicron variant. First, hospital systems in my District have been hit hard in recent days by the testing surge, as schools, workplaces, and travel destinations require proof of a negative COVID-19 test. Indeed, hospital emergency departments are now experiencing an onslaught of otherwise healthy individuals presenting in the emergency department in search of a COVID-19 test. This occurrence speaks to the demand for greater testing accessibility. In light of these shortages, please continue to partner with private sector leaders and use the full power of the federal government – including through the Defense Production Act – to further boost rapid testing supply across the country.

Second, as we await the shipment of additional rapid at-home tests, please continue your work to establish pop-up vaccination sites operated by the federal government in regions of New Jersey and around the country where demand for testing far exceeds the current supply. Likewise, please continue to work with state leaders to further deploy National Guard personnel to support

COVID-19 testing and related efforts. Just as the National Guard was activated in early 2021 to distribute vaccines, we can now utilize federal personnel to staff temporary testing sites in locations with the highest demand.

Third, as the highly transmissible Omicron variant wreaks havoc on the healthcare workforce, the federal government has a role to play in staffing our hospitals and long-term care facilities. Just this week, New Jersey Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli asked for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) “strike teams” to be deployed across New Jersey to counter the depletion of staff in crucial hospital systems. Quick action from your Administration to deliver these strike teams where needed would go a long way toward alleviating these shortages.

Fourth, having spoken this week with frontline workers and healthcare providers in many of New Jersey’s largest health systems, I encourage your Administration to take action as soon as possible to expand the availability of specific COVID-19 treatments and therapeutics currently in high demand. For example, hospitals in my District are struggling to maintain an adequate supply of monoclonal antibody treatments, such as GlaxoSmithKline’s Sotrovimab, with demonstrated efficacy against the Omicron variant.

Finally, as new antiviral drugs such as Pfizer’s Paxlovid become more widely available, I urge your Administration to ensure adequate supply of these therapeutics is sent directly to hospital systems rather than retail pharmacies alone. In my recent conversations with frontline hospital personnel, there was frustration that such medications are not more widely available where they are most needed – in the hospital setting. Your leadership, alongside private sector partners, on these matters can make a lifesaving difference for those in need.

Thank you for your ongoing leadership during this challenging time and the immediate steps you have already taken to move our nation beyond this pandemic. By taking the additional steps outlined here, we can lessen the impact of the Omicron variant and minimize the disruptions it will cause in the coming weeks. I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,



Josh Gottheimer
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

CC: The Honorable Xavier Becerra, Secretary
U.S. Department Health and Human Services
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CC: The Honorable Phil Murphy

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