

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 15, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Azar:

We write today regarding the disturbing trend in novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) infections spreading across long-term care facilities in our state of New Jersey and across the country.

According to public reporting, more than 3,300 deaths in nursing homes and long-term care facilities nationwide have been attributed to COVID-19. This alarming number is up from about 450 deaths a couple of weeks ago. As of the drafting of this letter, 324 long-term facilities in New Jersey, or more than three-quarters of all long-term care facilities in the state, have confirmed cases of COVID-19. These facilities have more than 5,264 confirmed cases with sadly 389 deaths.

These outbreaks not only put seniors and other residents of long-term care facilities at an increased risk but also the front-line workers at these facilities. While we are making progress, a critical shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) remains for front-line health care workers in long-term care facilities, hospitals, and for first responders. Many of the long-term care facilities in our state are already facing critical staffing shortages and if more front-line workers become infected, this problem will only get worse.

While we appreciate the recent guidance for long-term care facilities that has been issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), including efforts to create staffing teams and isolate residents that may be infected, we are afraid that the current situation in New Jersey is untenable and a more robust response is necessary.

We respectfully request that the Department of Health and Human Service (HHS), working with CMS, consider a possible deployment of men and women from the U.S. Public Health Service to assist with the critical staffing needs at long-term care facilities in New Jersey and to ensure that we can adequately stem the tide of this outbreak any further. Additionally, we urge you to provide additional PPE resources from the Strategic National Stockpile for front-line workers in these settings.

We appreciate your leadership during this critical time and stand ready to assist you in protecting our most vulnerable communities.

Sincerely,



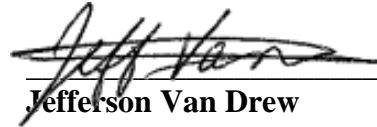
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