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# United States Senate

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March 15, 2020

The Honorable Mark A. Morgan  
Acting Commissioner  
U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20229

Robert R. Redfield, M.D.  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Acting Commissioner Morgan and Director Redfield:

I write to request information about, and immediate action to address, reports of confusion and dysfunction at some of the 13 U.S. airports implementing enhanced health screening of travelers from Europe. Immediately after President Trump's new travel restrictions went into effect, reports emerged about jam-packed airport terminals, long lines, and hours of delays as travelers waited to be questioned by health authorities about potential coronavirus exposure.<sup>1</sup> I am concerned that this chaos is not only adding to the public anxiety about coronavirus, but endangering public health by forcing large groups into close proximity with potentially infected individuals. I therefore request details about both of your agencies' enhanced screening procedures, as well as the actions you are taking to mitigate and prevent the spread of this dysfunction at our airports.

Effective yesterday, travelers on flights from designated areas in Europe are being channeled through one of 13 U.S. airports, where they will undergo "enhanced health screenings" for the coronavirus.<sup>2</sup> These screening procedures include a review of each traveler's medical history, an examination of symptoms, and instructions for self-quarantine, but no testing for the

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Hawkins, Hannah Natanson, Hannah Knowles, *Coronavirus screening causes massive bottlenecks at O'Hare and other U.S. airports*, Wash. Post (Mar. 15, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2020/03/14/europe-travel-ban-airport-delays>.

<sup>2</sup> Lori Aratani and Nick Miroff, *Passengers flying to the U.S. from 26 countries in Europe will face enhanced screening*, Wash. Post (Mar. 13, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2020/03/13/travelers-europe-will-face-additional-scrutiny>.

coronavirus.<sup>3</sup> Although this new policy was meant to slow the spread of the coronavirus from Europe to the United States, I am concerned that it may be having the opposite effect.

Shortly after the Administration's new screening procedures began, reports and complaints about massive crowds and hours-long waits at customs emerged from travelers at airports including O'Hare International,<sup>4</sup> Dallas-Fort Worth International,<sup>5</sup> and John F. Kennedy International.<sup>6</sup> As a result, "throng[s] of people [are] standing shoulder-to-shoulder in bottlenecks" that create the exact conditions for facilitating a spread of the highly contagious coronavirus.<sup>7</sup> This dysfunction is unacceptable because it unnecessarily adds to the growing anxiety about coronavirus while potentially exacerbating our global health crisis.

Although I understand that these same reports have not appeared at other airports conducting enhanced screening, such as Logan International in Boston, I am concerned that these conditions could arise at all 13 of the designated points of entry for travelers from Europe. I therefore urge your agencies to immediately allocate increased staffing and resources to every airport conducting enhanced health screening of passengers, as well as to begin actual testing for the coronavirus at these points of entry. I also request details about the guidance you have given officials implementing these procedures on the ground, as well as any plans your agencies have to improve the health screening process moving forward.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I respectfully request your response no later than Friday, March 20.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Homeland Security, *Fact Sheet: DHS Notice of Arrival Restrictions on China, Iran and Schengen Countries of Europe*, DHS.gov (Mar. 13, 2020), <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2020/03/13/fact-sheet-dhs-notice-arrival-restrictions-china-iran-and-schengen-countries-europe>.

<sup>4</sup> *Long Lines at O'Hare Airport Due to Enhanced Coronavirus Screenings*, NBC5 Chicago (Mar. 14, 2020), <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/long-lines-at-ohare-airport-due-to-coronavirus-screenings/2237389>.

<sup>5</sup> Loyd Brumfield, *Travelers returning home from overseas waiting for hours at DFW Airport due to enhanced screening procedures*, Dallas Morning News (Mar. 14, 2020), <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/2020/03/15/travelers-returning-home-from-overseas-face-hours-long-waits-at-dfw-airport-due-to-enhanced-screening-procedures>.

<sup>6</sup> David Meyer and Vincent Baron, *JFK, Newark airports see large crowds under new coronavirus 'enhanced screenings'*, NY Post (Mar. 15, 2020), <https://nypost.com/2020/03/15/jfk-newark-airports-see-large-crowds-under-new-coronavirus-enhanced-screenings>.

<sup>7</sup> Hawkins, *supra* note 1.