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U.S. SENATE CLIMATE CHANGE TASK FORCE

# United States Senate

SUITE SD-255  
DIRKSEN BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2107  
202-224-2742

975 JFK FEDERAL BUILDING  
15 NEW SUDBURY STREET  
BOSTON, MA 02203  
617-565-8519

222 MILLIKEN BOULEVARD, SUITE 312  
FALL RIVER, MA 02721  
508-677-0523

1550 MAIN STREET, 4TH FLOOR  
SPRINGFIELD, MA 01103  
413-785-4610

April 2, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence  
Vice President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington DC 25000

The Honorable Peter T. Gaynor  
Administrator  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
500 C Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Vice President Pence and Administrator Gaynor,

We write to call on you to address the inadequate protection for frontline workers providing essential services during the coronavirus crisis. The White House Coronavirus Task Force (Task Force) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) must take steps to protect all frontline workers — those who provide an essential or key public service — by ensuring they have adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) appropriate for the tasks they undertake, such as masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer.

As our country faces the challenges this pandemic poses, we are reminded of just how essential many workers are.<sup>1</sup> Frontline workers include any workers that perform essential services in sectors including health, food service, transportation, and emergency response. Frontline workers are critical in grocery stores, restaurants, delivery services, mass transportation, sanitation, prisons, utilities, security, and emergency response, among other sectors of the economy. Many of these workers have numerous close contacts with other employees, customers, and the public, putting them at higher risk for coronavirus infection. Without the ability to conduct proper physical distancing and PPE, these workers face significant danger.

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<sup>1</sup> Valerie Bauerlein, Jennifer Levitz, and Alejandro Lazo, *The New Front-Line Coronavirus Workers: Grocery Clerks, Delivery Drivers*, Wall St. J. (Mar. 24, 2020), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/unexpected-heroes-on-the-frontlines-of-americas-coronavirus-lockdown-11585058205>.

Frontline workers across the country have made it clear that they lack needed PPE. Workers at Instacart and Whole Foods staged strikes this week to protest the lack of PPE and to demand safer working conditions.<sup>2</sup> McDonald's workers went on strike in California and Illinois, warning they did not have enough soap to clean their hands or access to gloves or masks.<sup>3</sup> Sanitation workers went on strike in Pittsburgh last week to protest unsafe working conditions and the lack of PPE.<sup>4</sup> Bus drivers in Detroit who lacked gloves or hand sanitizer from the city transportation department refused to drive routes.<sup>5</sup> And Amazon warehouse workers walked off the job on Monday to protest working conditions and inadequate protections.<sup>6</sup> The needs of frontline workers are simply not being met.

Frontline workers need PPE because they are exposed to the virus in the course of their work. Grocery store clerks, food delivery employees, and other frontline workers may interact with tens or hundreds of customers a day, exposing themselves to the virus without protection. A growing body of evidence shows that the virus can spread through small particles, generated by breathing or talking, that linger in the air for 30 minutes or more.<sup>7</sup> The director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warned Tuesday that as many as 25 percent of people infected may not show symptoms but can contribute to the spread of the virus.<sup>8</sup> Health care workers face the greatest exposure, and are the most in need of PPE, but other frontline workers also deserve this protection.

Workers should not need to risk their lives providing essential services. The federal government must ensure that all frontline workers are valued and protected. In many cases, corporations continue to put profit over worker safety.<sup>9</sup> We call on you address this grossly inadequate gap in worker protection. Accordingly, please respond to the following questions by April 10, 2020:

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<sup>2</sup> Melissa Repko and Annie Palmer, *With strikes and a 'sick out,' some grocery and delivery workers take defiant stance: One-time bonuses, temporary pay hikes aren't enough*, CNBC (Mar. 31, 2020), <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/31/grocery-and-delivery-workers-demand-more-coronavirus-protection-say-pay-isnt-enough.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Greenhouse, *Is Your Grocery Delivery Worth a Worker's Life?* N.Y. Times (Mar. 30, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/30/opinion/coronavirus-worker-strike.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Mike Elk, *Black Garbage Workers Go on Wildcat Strike in Pittsburgh as General Strike Wave Spreads*, Payday Report (Mar. 25, 2020), <https://paydayreport.com/black-garbage-workers-go-on-wildcat-strike-in-pittsburgh-as-general-strike-wave-spreads/>.

<sup>5</sup> Nick Monacelli and Dave Bartkowiak Jr., *DDOT bus drivers refusing to drive routes with coronavirus concerns; service shut down*, ClickOnDetroit (Mar. 17, 2020), <https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/local/2020/03/17/ddot-bus-drivers-refusing-to-drive-routes-with-coronavirus-concerns/>.

<sup>6</sup> Noam Scheiber and Kate Conger, *Strikes at Instacart and Amazon Over Coronavirus Health Concerns*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 30, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/30/business/economy/coronavirus-instacart-amazon.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Apoorva Mandavilli, *How Long Will Coronavirus Live on Surfaces or in the Air Around You?* N.Y. Times (Mar. 17, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/17/health/coronavirus-surfaces-aerosols.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Apoorva Mandavilli, *Infected but Feeling Fine: The Unwitting Coronavirus Spreaders*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 31, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/31/health/coronavirus-asymptomatic-transmission.html>.

<sup>9</sup> The Editorial Board, *The Companies Putting Profits Ahead of Public Health*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 14, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/14/opinion/sunday/coronavirus-paid-sick-leave.html>.

1. How do FEMA and the Task Force define frontline workers for the purposes of estimating PPE needs?
2. Is FEMA including non-hospital based members of the health care workforce, such as emergency medical technicians, police officers, firefighters, corrections officers, and urgent care and other outpatient care providers in estimating PPE needs?
3. Is FEMA including the following workers in estimating PPE needs?
  - a) Workers in the food supply chain that have close contact with others or the potential to be exposed, such as workers in grocery stores, food delivery, restaurants, warehouse and distribution facilities, food processing facilities, and fishermen.
  - b) Workers in the transportation sector including delivery truck drivers and bus drivers.
  - c) Workers in public services such as trash and recycling collection, sewage facilities, water facilities, and other essential public services
4. What guidance has FEMA, the Task Force, or the CDC provided to frontline workers on how to protect themselves?
5. Do FEMA and the Task Force have a plan to ensure that frontline workers receive PPE, including products such as masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer? If so, please describe or provide that plan. If not, why not?

Thank you in advance for your attention to this important issue. If you have questions, please contact Adam Axler or Georgia Lagoudas on my staff at [adam\\_axler@markey.senate.gov](mailto:adam_axler@markey.senate.gov) or [georgia\\_lagoudas@markey.senate.gov](mailto:georgia_lagoudas@markey.senate.gov).

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator