

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 14, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
330 C Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20416

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

Dear Secretary Azar and Administrator Gaynor:

We are writing to request your assistance in helping Maine more easily access personal protective equipment (PPE) secured by the COVID-19 Supply Chain Stabilization Task Force.

Hospitals, health care workers, and first responders are on the front lines of the battle against COVID-19. Ensuring their ability to access appropriate PPE is critical for maintaining necessary health care staffing levels and for protecting those who are putting their health and safety at risk to care for others.

The Supply Chain Stabilization Task Force was created to execute the Whole-of-America approach during this unprecedented modern epidemic. Key aspects of the Task Force's work include Project Air Bridge, which is working to speed the delivery of much needed PPE and other medical supplies, and the National Resource Prioritization Cell, which is intended to unify government and private industry prioritization recommendations.

Under Project Air Bridge, 50 percent of PPE and critical supplies go to those areas with greatest need (i.e. hotspots), while the remaining 50 percent is infused into the broader U.S. supply chain, with prioritization given to hospitals, health care facilities, and nursing homes. We have heard repeated concerns from Maine State government agencies, hospitals, and other first responders, including firefighters, that they are unclear how to take advantage of this this accelerated infusion of PPE into the supply chain, as well as how the distribution of this PPE will be prioritized for distribution by both federal and private entities.

We ask that HHS and FEMA work together to provide clear guidance to states and others on how to gain access to additional PPE and the expanded and accelerated supply chain made possible by the Task Force. Several states are also searching independently for suppliers – both internationally and domestically – but finding barriers to procurement. We urge FEMA to consider providing additional guidance to states on how to authenticate suppliers to help facilitate PPE purchases.

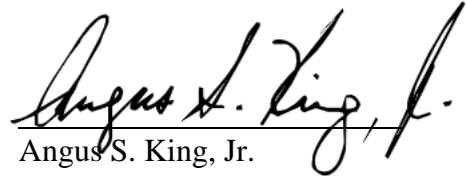
New research out of the CDC indicates that COVID-19 is more contagious and spreads faster than initially measured. Older adults remain in the highest risk category, accounting for eight out of ten COVID-19 deaths in the United States. Maine's population is the oldest in the nation by median age, and Maine's hospitalization rate due to COVID-19 is 6.2 per 100,000 – higher than the national average of 4.6. Further, healthcare workers in Maine account for 17 percent of cases. With each passing day that the virus continues to spread, health care workers and first line responders across the country are bravely risking their lives to aid their fellow Americans through this devastating pandemic. It is imperative that those on the front lines of this pandemic – the health care workers and first responders – have ready access to potentially lifesaving PPE.

Thank you for your focus on protecting Americans during this very challenging time. We look forward to working with you to meet this urgent need to protect our critical workers on the front lines.

Sincerely,



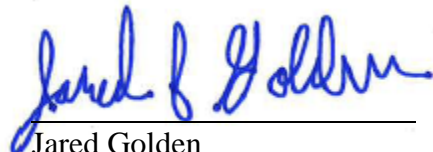
Susan M. Collins
U.S. Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
U.S. Senator



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Jared Golden
Member of Congress