

U.S. PIRG

U.S. Public Interest Research Group

6/26/2020

U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander

Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Dear Chairman Alexander,

I'm writing on behalf of the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) to provide comment on the white paper, "Preparing for the Next Pandemic."

As stated in the introduction to the paper, "Only the federal government can fund research at the scale necessary to create tests, treatments, and vaccines for a pandemic, coordinate the distribution of supplies and information at the national level, and provide states with the level of funding they need to respond to an unforeseen crisis."

That's a lesson that the federal government has failed to learn after three months of combatting the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The lack of transparent federal coordination on securing and distributing personal protective equipment (PPE), and establishing comprehensive testing, has hindered response efforts on the ground and put healthcare workers and the public at risk.

Rather than coordinating the supply chain and establishing a transparent system to get medical supplies directly to areas in need, the federal government has largely left states to fend for themselves. The result is that states, local governments, and hospitals are [competing against each other](#) and the federal government for supplies, and healthcare workers still aren't getting what they need to protect themselves and save lives.

While the white paper suggests important steps forward, including ways to replenish the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) and clarify the process for how states can request supplies from the SNS, it falls short of recommending the central, transparent coordination needed to remedy current supply chain failures.

The war against COVID-19 is far from over. As case rates and hospitalizations increase across several states, it's imperative that Congress plugs the glaring holes in our medical supply chain now.

Therefore, we strongly urge you and members of the committee to support including the [Medical Supply Transparency and Delivery Act](#) (S.3627), introduced by Sen. Tammy Baldwin and Sen. Chris Murphy, into the next Senate coronavirus stimulus package, as the House recently did. The bill would:

- Create a central coordinator position to oversee federal purchasing and distribution of medical supplies. This person would have the full authority to utilize the Defense Production Act in order to compel companies to produce necessary medical equipment.
- Establish transparency and accountability in handling of the medical supply chain including:
 - Public, weekly reports of current stockpiles of supplies and projected needs.
 - Publicly posting states' requests for medical equipment and locations where supplies are distributed.

These measures are crucial to ensuring a steady, reliable supply of PPE and testing supplies for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis. As the United States of America, we need to be united in protecting health care workers so that they can protect everyone.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Matthew Wellington

Public Health Campaigns Director, U.S. PIRG

**The following groups support including the Medical Supply Transparency and Delivery Act in the next Senate coronavirus stimulus package.*

U.S. PIRG

Get Us PPE

Pennsylvania Public Health Association

Pennsylvania Association of Community Health Centers

Sheep Inc Health Care Center/NAFC/ FCAP

HAHC

Maternity Care Coalition

Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action

Massachusetts Public Health Association

Health Care For All Massachusetts
IL Association of Area Agencies on Aging
Respiratory Health Association
AIDS Foundation Chicago
EverThrive Illinois
SEIU Healthcare Illinois
Illinois Public Health Association
MSU UHP Dental Services
Montana Medical Student Association
Montana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Master's of Public Health Graduate Student Association
Missouri College of Emergency Physicians
Maine Radiologic Society
Consumers for Affordable Health Care
The Maine Society For Respiratory Care (MeSRC)
Maine Association of Psychiatric Physicians
CU Anschutz Women's Health Interest Group
Orthopedic Surgery Interest Group
Sports Medicine Interest Group (CU Anschutz SOM)
Denver Health United Workers
University of Colorado Oncology Group
UFCW Local 7
University of Colorado School of Medicine Family Medicine Interest Group (FMIG)
American Medical Women's Association RVU
The University of Colorado School of Medicine SNMA chapter
The American Medical Women's Association
American Medical Women's Association at Colorado State University
AMWA CU Boulder
Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains
School Nurses Organization of Arizona
Washington University Physicians