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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
APPROPRIATIONS

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY

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February 26, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Azar:

I am writing to follow up on the exchange that we had this morning during your testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies.

I am concerned that there has been a lack of consistent communication from federal entities with state and local agencies in the response to the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). For example, while Newark Airport in my home state of New Jersey has been designated a funnel site, state officials have not been able to gain clarity from federal officials on important logistical decisions. It is also my understanding that the State of New Jersey still lacks information about the exact cost-sharing model to address a potential COVID-19 outbreak in the community.

Further, New Jersey has made plans to house asymptomatic individuals that require quarantine at Joint Base Maguire-Dix-Lakehurst, and state officials have expressed concern because the current availability of the base expires on March 5, 2020. However, during our exchange, you suggested that use of this base would not be necessary because New York would take non-residents. This lack of clear communication between your Department and state officials is disconcerting, especially in light of a lack of clear leadership in the Administration to respond to COVID-19.

I hope that you can remedy the situation expeditiously and provide clarity for New Jersey, and all other state officials about that federal expectations to address what the World Health Organization says could be a global pandemic. I would be happy to connect you and your staff with our state officials if that is helpful.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress