

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 24, 2020

The Honorable Peter Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Federal Center Plaza
500 C St. SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Gaynor:

We urge you to provide sufficient and appropriate medical personnel and equipment as part of the Mission Assignment for any field hospitals and clinics being deployed to Washington to ensure they will be fully staffed and equipped. We appreciate the additional bed capacity that we understand is set to be deployed to Washington, however, it will fail to meet the State's needs and the federal government's goals in deploying such assets if it does not include additional medical personnel and equipment.

In particular, we strongly urge you to work closely with Secretary Esper in determining how military medical personnel may be used as part of this effort. The Military Health System has a mission to maintain a ready medical force that is prepared to respond to the full spectrum of military operations. This includes humanitarian missions.

Many other states and cities are projected to face shortcomings in their health care system; Washington is facing a crisis now. Hospitals in our State are already overwhelmed by the exponential growth in hospitalizations related to COVID-19. Washington has just 1.7 hospital beds per 1,000 residents, significantly below the national average of 2.4 beds per 1,000 residents.

Part of the reason we believed it was critical to send the U.S.N.S. Mercy to the Puget Sound region is that it would come already staffed. Washington already faces an insufficient number of health care providers to handle the COVID-19 outbreak. Washington's Registered Nurse (RN) to population ratio of 781 to 100,000 is well below the national average of 825 RNs to 100,000 population. Over 2,200,000 people in Washington live in a designated Primary Care Professional Shortage Area. Twenty-two percent of licensed physicians currently practice in other states, and twenty-five percent of RNs have a Washington license but do not practice in Washington.

As the first and hardest hit region in the country by COVID-19 to date, the health care workforce in Washington has only been further strained. The number of available nurses and physicians has decreased due to fatigue and illness caused by the outbreak. It is estimated that 35 percent of physicians are married to other physicians and have childcare responsibilities. Furthermore, an estimated 75 percent of nurses must either care for a child and/or an elderly relative at home. The necessary closure of schools and impact of the outbreak has led many of these health care workers to have to stay home to care for themselves and their families. The shortage of health care personnel in Washington resulting from the severity of the State's COVID-19 outbreak is one that we desperately need the federal government to supplement.

As we wrote to President Trump on March 18, hospitals in the Puget Sound region will soon have to implement crisis care standards and make excruciating decisions about care rationing.

Our State and local health agencies have taken extreme actions and exhausted every avenue to support our hospitals. But without urgent federal action, our state will see a near total collapse of hospitals in Washington like we have seen in other places such as Italy.

We understand that a 148-bed field hospital with medical staff is being prepared to deploy to Washington from Fort Carson. As you know, this initial deployment is still far short of the 1,000 beds and staff that would have come with the U.S.N.S. Mercy. We request a timeline for exactly when the deployment from Fort Carson will be operational in Washington and when a decision about additional deployments of beds and medical personnel from federal agencies to Washington will be made.

Washington desperately needs additional bed capacity, but just as vital is that this additional capacity be accompanied by federal medical personnel and equipment. Anything short of this greatly jeopardizes the ability for Washington's health care system to meet the urgent and growing needs of our communities.

Sincerely,



Adam Smith
Member of Congress



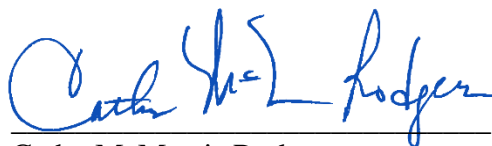
Patty Murray
United States Senator



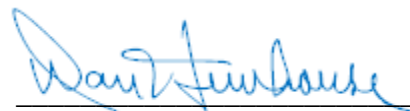
Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress




Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



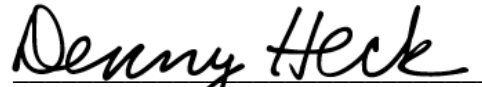
Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress



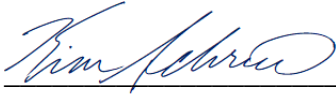
Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



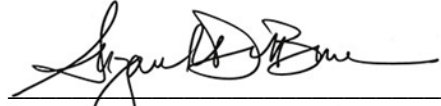
Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



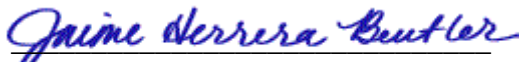
Denny Heck
Member of Congress



Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress



Suzan DeBene
Member of Congress



Jamie Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Mike Pence, Vice President, United States of America
The Honorable Mark Esper, Secretary of Defense
The Honorable Alex Azar, Secretary of Health and Human Services