

KIM SCHRIER, M.D.
Member of Congress
8th District, Washington

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Committee on Agriculture



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August 26, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary of Education
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH
Office of the Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road, NE
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Secretary Becerra, Secretary Cardona, Secretary Austin, and Dr. Walensky:

I write today seeking an update from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Education (Ed) and Department of Defense (DOD) on strategies for school COVID-19 testing, and on how the money appropriated by Congress for such COVID-19 testing is being implemented.

As you are aware, the landscape of the pandemic has changed. Case counts have increased nearly 30 percent in the last two weeks, leading to higher rates of hospitalization and death among the unvaccinated population. As children, most still unvaccinated, return to school, we have seen a renewed demand for testing as one tool to help keep students safe.

This past March, the *American Rescue Plan* (P.L. 117-2) appropriated \$10 billion dollars to carry out Titles I, III, and VII of the Defense Production Act (DPA), specifically to procure medical supplies and equipment as well as support domestic manufacturing. The law also appropriated \$50 billion for testing, of which \$10 billion would be channeled to states to support COVID-19 screening testing for teachers, staff and students to assist schools in providing safe in-person instruction. Ed and the CDC provided basic guidance and frameworks for schools in early in 2021.

This is all in accordance with President Biden's National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response¹, with HHS working with the CDC, the Department of Defense (DoD) and others, to: launch a pilot program to expand COVID-19 testing for schools and underserved populations through coordinating centers; increase domestic manufacturing of testing supplies and raw materials; and rapidly increase genomic sequencing of the virus.

I recognize interagency coordination through the Testing and Diagnostics Working Group, including the Industry Engagement and Industrial Base Expansion teams, is a joint operation, and that efforts take time and planning. However, time is of the essence. With the start of the school year upon us and the Delta variant causing a concerning uptick in cases, particularly in places with low vaccination rates, I am concerned about the wellbeing of our children, families, and communities. The money has been appropriated. Now I am seeking clarity in the implementation of plans. I am asking HHS, DoD, Ed, and CDC to help me understand:

- How much of the \$10 billion appropriated in the *American Rescue Plan* to carry out activities under Titles I, III, and VII of the Defense Production Act (DPA) has been spent on testing procurement, acquisition, and industrial scaling?
- How much of the \$10 billion for states to reopen schools in the *American Rescue Plan* has gone out to the states? How are CDC and ED tracking schools that have received funding and how they have utilized testing?
- How is the federal government tracking and disseminating information on school testing programs? What kind of tests a school is using? (rapid antigen, pooled PCR, etc.) How often are students and staff tested? Positivity rates? Impact of testing on case rates? Has more frequent testing prevented school closures and missed instruction from required quarantine?
- While the CDC released a framework entitled the *Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Mitigation*² to help schools make decisions and weigh risks as they bring students back to school, schools are still waiting on best practices/largely still left on their own to figure out how to implement testing. When can we expect best practice guidance from the CDC and Ed?
- What have HHS and DoD done to increase domestic manufacturing of testing supplies and raw materials? Is there a sufficient supply of rapid tests to meet the projected need?
- Which companies have entered into procurement agreements? Are market competition and price negotiation being utilized as tools to stretch those \$10B as much as possible?
- Once tests are procured, how are they distributed?
- What do agencies need, if anything, from Congress to ensure that schools and families have access to affordable tests that they can use frequently as a screening tool?

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/National-Strategy-for-the-COVID-19-Response-and-Pandemic-Preparedness.pdf>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html>

Thank you for your tireless work during this public health crisis, and for your efforts to protect the health and safety of our families and communities from COVID-19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Kim Schrier", positioned above a horizontal line.

Kim Schrier, M.D.
MEMBER OF CONGRESS