

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 25, 2020

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

The Honorable Brett Giroir
Assistant Secretary for Health
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20416

Dear Administrator Gaynor and Assistant Secretary Giroir:

We urge the Federal Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to immediately allow federally-supported community-based testing sites in Washington state the ability to send specimens to available state and local public health labs as their capacity allows and to grant additional flexibility to optimize the public health impact of these resources.

As you know, the federal government opened four community-based testing sites in King, Snohomish and Pierce counties. We thank the federal government for this increased testing capacity during the COVID-19 crisis. Unfortunately, FEMA and HHS have informed the state that sites are required to send specimens to commercial labs, where they face a turnaround time of up to eight days.

As the first state impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, stakeholders from across the state have been working for months to respond to this public health threat. The Washington State Public Health Lab and the University of Washington Department of Virology (UW Virology) Lab have been working steadfastly to increase testing capacity in the state. UW Virology Lab continues to add more capacity every day. These labs are capable of turning around specimens in 24 to 48 hours and stand ready to process specimens from community-based testing sites.

Despite this capacity, FEMA and HHS have refused to make the necessary policy change to allow these tests to go to nearby labs, forcing Washingtonians to wait an extra week for test results while providing no additional public health rationale or benefits. During such a time of crisis and uncertainty, this is unacceptable. We ask that you immediately provide for flexibility

for all states to allow specimens from community-based testing sites to be sent to their state and local public health labs, as capacity allows.

We must make use of options that are local and high-speed before considering options that are remote and slower. In this time of crisis, unused testing capacity and available staff must take priority.

Sincerely,



Denny Heck
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Adam Smith
Member of Congress



Suzan DelBene
Member of Congress



Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress



Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator