

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 20, 2020

Secretary Alex Azar
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

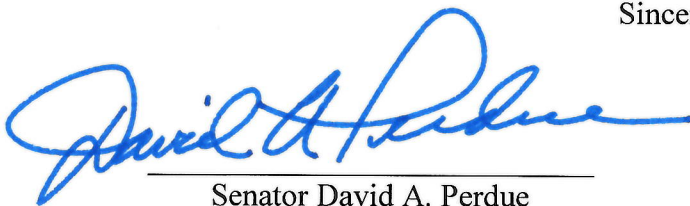
Secretary Azar:

We commend President Donald Trump, Vice President Pence, and this Administration's quick and decisive action to limit the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). The decision to rapidly expand the availability of COVID-19 test kits will provide our communities and health care industry some much needed information to protect our health care workers and their supply of medical equipment. However, we'd like to express our concerns related to the lengthy turnaround time for some of these tests in the commercial laboratory space. Time is valuable in a hospital environment where personal protective equipment (PPE) must be used until a test comes back negative. Any delay in test results absorbs beds and PPE necessary to treat our sickest patients. We appreciate the work that the commercial labs and state public health departments are doing to help keep people out of the emergency rooms for testing so that our Academic Health Centers can focus on treating patients.

As you are aware, our country is facing a nationwide shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE). Health care workers must be outfitted in PPE to protect themselves against the transmission of COVID-19, and the clarity that comes from a test result allows for health care workers to more quickly process patients and stretch their PPE further. While the commercial laboratories in our state have turnaround times in the range of 2 to 6 days, our Academic Medical Centers have been able to return test results in a matter of hours. Here in Georgia, Emory University has developed their own test and will soon be able to process hundreds of samples each day with a six-hour turnaround. In addition, Augusta University has used its infrastructure and resources to set up a drive-through testing site for residents in the area. This is vital to protecting patients, getting healthcare workers back into the workforce safely, and continuing to stem new infections. We request that any resources devoted to increasing laboratory capacity and the supply of reagents, plastic components, and testing kits include a special focus on academic medical health centers and their innovative methods.

Again, we commend this Administration for its work to contain COVID-19. Thank you for your consideration, we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Senator David A. Perdue



Senator Kelly Loeffler