

May 5, 2020

The Honorable Robert R. Redfield
Director
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
395 E St SW
Washington, DC 20024

The Honorable Judy Monroe
President
The CDC Foundation
600 Peachtree Street NE, Suite 1000
Atlanta, Georgia 30308

Dear Director Redfield and President Monroe:

We write regarding the CDC Foundation's required qualifications for prospective Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) contact tracers. Establishing a robust public health workforce is essential to responding to the COVID-19 crisis effectively. Experts agree that to reopen the economy, we need as many as 300,000 individuals to serve as contact tracers to track and, consequently, limit the spread of the virus. Investing in a dedicated public health workforce will not only allow for us to fight the virus effectively, but it will also provide much-needed job opportunities for the 26 million Americans who have lost their jobs in the last five weeks.

In order to fight this virus and offer good-paying job opportunities to Americans, contact tracing jobs should be open to every individual who can do the work. Indeed, highly successful contact tracing programs run by non-profit organizations with deep experience responding to epidemics, such as Partners in Health, do not require applicants to possess a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, we know that recent high school or associate's degree graduates will be entering a job market that is unforgiving and, given a limited work history, will be unable to receive unemployment compensation. We also know that COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting low-income communities and communities of color. Excluding a large share of the individuals who best understand these communities will limit our ability to contact trace effectively where it is most needed. It will also deny a foothold in a health career to people from underserved communities who are critical to fill the future health workforce gaps across the country.

We are dismayed to have learned that the CDC is requiring applicants to the CDC Foundation's Contact Tracer position to possess a bachelor's degree. This decision excludes individuals who would be well-equipped to excel in such a position and may slow down the agency's efforts to scale up its contact tracing force to the levels that are desperately needed. We firmly believe that these positions should be open to a broader set of applicants, including those with a high school degree, a GED, or an associate's degree. Anyone who is able to do the job, should be eligible to do the job.

We strongly urge the CDC to reconsider its decision and broaden the criteria for those applying to contact tracer positions.

Sincerely,

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Tina Smith
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator