

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
COMMERCE
HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

October 16, 2020

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On April 13, 2020, I wrote to you on behalf of Wisconsinites calling for the supplies needed to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ In my letter, I urged you to act to deliver this assistance swiftly. It is now six months later, and Wisconsin is still experiencing supply shortages, which couldn't come at a worse time. Wisconsin is currently experiencing one of the most serious outbreaks in the nation, and health care providers continue to share concerns about supply shortages. It is long past time for you to show leadership and take action to support our state with the supplies that we need and deserve.

In September, cases of COVID-19 in Wisconsin began to increase steadily, with extremely concerning spikes in the Northeastern region, specifically the Fox Valley area. As of this writing, over the past seven days, Langdale and Menominee counties have reported over 1,100 new cases per 100,000 residents.² Last week, I spoke to Dr. Imran Andrabi, the President and CEO of ThedaCare, a community health system in Northeastern Wisconsin. Like many health care leaders in the state, Dr. Andrabi has raised concerns about the seriousness of the outbreak in the region, telling reporters on October 7 that ThedaCare was overcapacity and did not have beds available for patients.³ Between 200 and 250 of Dr. Andrabi's staff members have been unable to come to work due to illness from or exposure to COVID-19.⁴

Dr. Andrabi spent this spring and summer working to ensure that ThedaCare was prepared for a potential surge in cases. But despite his best efforts, supply shortages remain. ThedaCare continues to face diversions of testing supplies, and is currently preparing for a shortage of N95 masks, which are critically needed to safely treat patients with COVID-19. Their situation is not unique. Frontline health care workers at Bellin Health in Green Bay are wearing N95 masks for

¹ https://www.baldwin.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2020%2004%2013%20STB%20letter%20to%20POTUS%20on%20failing%20to%20act_final%20FINAL.pdf

² <https://projects.jsonline.com/topics/coronavirus/tracking/covid-19-cases-testing-and-deaths-in-wisconsin.html>

³ <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/wisconsin/2020/10/07/wisconsin-preparing-open-alternate-care-facility-state-fair-park-state-continues-face-surge-covid-1/5909769002/>

⁴ <https://www.postcrescent.com/story/news/2020/10/07/wisconsin-coronavirus-green-bay-appleton-wausau-hospitals-reaching-breaking-point-state-prepares-ove/5915194002/>

longer than recommended while facing a potential shortage of surgical gowns. For months, Bellin's administrators have struggled to identify a reliable supplier. Since April, UW-Health in Madison has experienced consistent shortages of the reagent needed for a number of their testing platforms. In August, I wrote to Vice President Pence expressing concerns about the suspension of pre-procedure testing at Advocate Aurora, a non-profit health care system with a presence in Wisconsin, due to supply diversions directed by your administration.⁵ And on October 6, the Greenfield Fire Department tweeted at you, expressing their need for testing equipment and N95 masks.⁶

Throughout this crisis, I have called on you to provide Wisconsin with the supplies we need to combat COVID-19. However, you have mismanaged the federal distribution of medical supplies we need and failed to work constructively with Congress to reach agreement on additional COVID-19 relief funding that our state desperately needs. On October 11, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Seema Verma, a member of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, said the federal government was ready to help Wisconsin in its current COVID-19 surge.⁷ Now, more than ever, Wisconsin needs your leadership to provide us with testing supplies and N95 masks. We cannot afford more of your empty promises, and we cannot afford to wait.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tammy Baldwin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

⁵ <https://www.baldwin.senate.gov/press-releases/federal-diversions-of-testing-supplies>

⁶ <https://www.jsonline.com/story/communities/southwest/news/greenfield/2020/10/12/greenfield-fire-department-tweets-trump-rapid-covid-19-tests/5941162002/>

⁷ <https://www.wisn.com/article/health-official-says-feds-ready-to-help-wisconsin/34336129>