

**Maine AFL-CIO Environmental Health Strategy Center Physicians for Social Responsibility
Maine Labor Group on Health Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center**

10 April 2020

The Honorable Susan Collins
United States Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Angus King
United States Senate
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
U.S. House of Representatives
2162 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jared Golden
U.S. House of Representatives
1223 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: More Action Urgently Needed to Protect Maine Workers and Public Health

Dear Senators Collins and King, and Representatives Pingree and Golden,

Thank you for your leadership in securing the recent passage of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which provides significant support to first responders, working families, businesses, and the economy to address this unprecedented crisis.

As representatives of Maine's public health, medical, labor, and immigrant communities, we remain very concerned, however, that our frontline workers still lack both adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) and widespread access to coronavirus testing. One in six confirmed coronavirus cases in Maine is among healthcare workers. But *all* essential workers are putting their lives on the line without adequate protection—grocery workers, postal workers, delivery people, sanitation workers, care givers, and many more.

Working people in Maine should have access to secure testing, workplace plans, and protective equipment. In late March, the first U.S. health care workers died from COVID-19 because they did not have the protections they needed to care for patients at work.

Workplace deaths due to COVID-19 can be prevented. Lives are at stake.

In this pandemic, protecting worker health and safety also means public health protection for all. Too many tragic deaths are following the still-rising number of confirmed COVID-19 cases. Yet as many as 30% of those infected may be asymptomatic and remain untested.

We urge you to implore the President to use every federal authority and resource to protect the health and safety of *all* frontline workers. The Administration must:

1. Require the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to adopt a Temporary Emergency Standard to protect all frontline workers from airborne infectious disease;
2. Immediately complete distribution of the masks and equipment held in the Strategic National Stockpile. Identify reserves of masks and equipment in other industries,

such as construction, and redistribute them to healthcare providers and other frontline workers;

3. Immediately direct the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to instruct the Pentagon where to send the remaining ventilators it says it has in its military stocks; and
4. Use all powers of the federal government, including more aggressive use of the Defense Production Act, to speed immediate production of personal protective equipment and ensure it is routed to states for distribution across acute care, home care, and long-term care settings as well as other industries whose workers confront the risk of exposure on a daily basis in their workplace.

Further, when Congress reconvenes soon, we urge you to immediately pass federal legislation to further address the health and economic threats of the pandemic:

1. If the Administration continues to fail to act, adopt an emergency occupational health standard by statute to require protection of *all* frontline workers from coronavirus, pending mandatory adoption of a Emergency Temporary Standard by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to address airborne infectious diseases for the first time;
2. Reopen the enrollment period for health insurance under the Affordable Care Act to help now uninsured workers who have lost employer-based health coverage;
3. Provide hazard pay to healthcare workers and other frontline workers, and increase direct payments to all Americans to offset the prolonged economic damage of the pandemic and reduce the real public health dangers caused by economic despair;
4. Provide for free coronavirus treatment for all patients, eliminating cost-sharing for treatment and vaccines, and including those who are uninsured;
5. Provide a significant, long-term investment in public health capacity among state, local, tribal, and territorial governments as well as the federal CDC, to ensure that our public health system and workforce is prepared to address the current pandemic and future public health emergencies with greater disease surveillance, epidemiology, laboratory capacity, community partnership, and all-hazards preparedness and response, among other critical public health needs; and
6. Provide a significant investment in infrastructure to strengthen our resilience and help put Americans back to work to rebuild aging hospitals and community health centers, replace aging water distributions systems to ensure access to safe drinking water for all, ensure that everyone has rural broadband internet access, and more to meet the backlog of needed spending.

We appreciate your leadership in protecting Mainers and all Americans from the ravages of this pandemic to our health and wellbeing. *Our federal government failed to timely respond to all the early coronavirus warnings with the urgency dictated by the science.*

We need your help. We're counting on continued urgent action by Congress to provide hope and relief so that we can emerge from the pandemic with fewer deaths and illness, and a readiness to rebuild. Thank you for your continued serious attention to this crisis.

You may direct your response to Mike Belliveau, mbelliveau@preventharm.org, who will share it with the undersigned organizational leaders and health care professionals.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Phinney, President
Maine AFL-CIO

Geoff Gratwick, MD
Maine State Senator, Chair
Health and Human Services Committee

Michael Belliveau, Executive Director
Environmental Health Strategy Center

Lani Graham, MD, MPH
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Charles de Sieyes, MD

Paul Liebow, MD

Christine L. Kramer, DO

cc: The Honorable Janet Mills, Governor, State of Maine
Nirav Shah, MD, JD, Director, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention