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June 8, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar,

At a time of unprecedented demand for COVID-19 testing, we ask you to distribute a portion of the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund (PHSSEF) funding appropriated by Congress for testing that has not otherwise been allocated directly to clinical laboratories to further promote widespread access to testing and support the ongoing efforts at the state and federal level to reopen the country.

Today, the United States is relying on commercial, public health, academic, and hospital laboratories like never before. To date, labs in the U.S. have conducted millions of COVID-19 tests, including molecular tests to diagnose COVID-19 and antibody tests to determine the number of individuals who have been infected. But these efforts do not come without a cost.

Laboratories have invested significant resources in equipment, supplies, and staffing to meet the very specific needs of COVID-19 testing demands, while simultaneously facing steep revenue declines for their usual work due to the public health emergency. We are appreciative of the steps HHS has taken to assist labs in scaling up testing demand in response to this public health emergency, including increasing Medicare payments for certain high-volume testing, allowing laboratories to invest in more expensive test platforms, and creating a billion dollar fund intended to reimburse the costs of testing the uninsured.

As you are aware, the recently enacted Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act (PPHCE Act) invests \$25 billion in the PHSSEF, including \$11 billion for states, localities, territories, and tribes, to enhance all aspects of COVID-19 testing capacity. This funding is in addition to the funds already appropriated to the PHSSEF under the CARES Act.

While laboratories are eligible, along with other providers, for these funds, there have been no federal funds specifically designated for the laboratories that have stepped up in this public health crisis and have made significant investments to expand access to COVID-19 testing despite 40-60 percent reductions in regular commercial volume due to the economic lockdowns.

As laboratories work to maintain their investments in critical resources for testing platforms, reagents, swabs, and PPE, as well as hiring, training, and overtime pay for the laboratory workforce, we urge HHS to direct a portion of funding that has not already been allocated towards these efforts. These funds will ensure that labs can continue to rapidly scale up diagnostic and antibody testing, particularly for healthcare workers, first responders, and other Americans on the frontlines of this pandemic – and ultimately for all citizens to be able to return to school, work, and the activities they enjoy.

Thank you for the ongoing efforts of the thousands of dedicated individuals at the Department working to support the COVID-19 public health response. We look forward to working with you to ensure that all

Americans have access to the testing they need to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and our country can reopen in a secure and healthy environment. Please contact Logan Hoover with Congressman Reed (logan.hoover@mail.house.gov, 202.225.3161) and Anais Borja with Congressman Peters (anais.borja@mail.house.gov, 202.225.0508) with any questions.

Sincerely,



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Member of Congress



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