

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 17, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

I write to convey the urgent need for personal protective equipment (PPE) for first responders working to keep our communities safe during this public health crisis. Across the Nation, first responders are being taken off the frontlines due to the shortage of protective gear and their exposure to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). As our communities prepare for an expected surge of COVID-19 cases in the coming weeks, more needs to be done to address the PPE supply shortage for first responders.

Illinois and many other States face a dire shortage of masks, protective eyewear, face shields, gloves, gowns and other protective equipment for our first responders. First responders, such as emergency medical personnel, firefighters and law enforcement officers, require PPE to safely head into emergency situations where they may come into contact with possibly infected residents and potentially have to transport patients to healthcare facilities. As with all other frontline worker, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that first responders wear PPE when interacting with individuals with confirmed or possible COVID-19 infections.

Yet fire and police departments across the country and in my home state of Illinois do not have an adequate amount of PPE on hand to safely do their jobs. To help address this shortage, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act included millions in funding for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program for firefighters and Emergency Medical Services personnel to purchase PPE. The Act also provided millions in funding for the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program to help law enforcement officers purchase PPE and address local resource needs in prisons.

Despite the additional funding, these departments are struggling to actually secure this equipment from their suppliers. With a limited supply of PPE available and a backlog for securing more, our Nation's first responders are vulnerable to exposure and infection as they work to combat this crisis. Failing to provide an adequate amount of PPE in a timely and efficient manner will weaken our Nation's emergency preparedness, public safety and ability to care for our communities as COVID-19 continues to spread.

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The Illinois Department of Public Health recently reported that the State is expected to go through 1.5 million N95 masks; 25 million pairs of gloves; 4.4 million gowns; and approximately 2 million surgical masks every ten days of combatting this pandemic. Unfortunately, the Federal Government has only been able to provide Illinois a fraction of the States' PPE request, forcing Illinois to compete against other States, our own Federal Government and other countries to purchase equipment.

I am reiterating my request that you immediately invoke the Defense Production Act (DPA) to order domestic manufacturers to prioritize U.S. orders to increase production of equipment. To ensure this critical equipment is delivered to those on the frontlines, the DPA must also be used to require supply chain management companies to accept and prioritize U.S. orders, so the protective equipment is swiftly distributed to our communities, including an adequate set aside for first responders. I urge you to use all available Federal resources, including continuing to leverage the DPA, to increase the supply of PPE and enhance the distribution of critical supplies that protects our brave first responders as they serve to keep the rest of us safe.

Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator