



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-3605

July 17, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar  
Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, health systems throughout the Gulf Coast in Texas have responded to meet the needs of our communities. Unfortunately, with the recent surge in COVID-19 cases, our health systems have been pushed to their limits.

Thank you for the Administration's responsiveness to our inquiries and requests thus far as our region addresses this surge in COVID-19 cases. After discussions with local leaders and hospital administrators, it is becoming clear that there is an ongoing need for additional support from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) particularly as it relates to the personnel necessary to address capacity shortfalls. The need to address surge capacity is especially important as we enter the peak of hurricane season on the Gulf Coast.

On June 1, 2020 there were 114 active cases in Nueces County. As of July 14<sup>th</sup>, there are 5,694 active cases. COVID-19 hospitalizations in the Corpus Christi Trauma Service Area have increased by over 2000% in the past month. In recent days, Nueces and Victoria Counties have become two of the highest per capita counties for new cases in Texas. The health systems and local officials are doing all they can to support and expand operations in light of these spikes. However, ICU beds are at or near capacity across the region.

Providers in our region have urgently requested additional staffing as well as medical supplies including oxygen, ventilators, personal protective equipment, and dialysis machines as well as additional facilities to enhance critical care and discharge capacity. With that in mind, we appreciate that your Department just approved a Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT) to assess the situation in Corpus Christi. While we are grateful for the federal medical personnel already in place or on the way,

we ask the DMAT to identify ways to help hospitals address ongoing personnel shortages as they work to meet surge capacity needs.

As the DMAT evaluates the situation on the ground, we ask that HHS promptly consider whether an additional tranche of hotspot funding under the Provider Relief Fund provided in the CARES Act would be appropriate for areas, like the Coastal Bend, that have experienced surges after the April 10<sup>th</sup> and June 10<sup>th</sup> cutoffs. We also write to ask you to consider whether the region needs a Federal Medical Station, or similar facility, if the surge in hospitalizations continues either from COVID-19 or unforeseen weather events, and in the event that local health systems cannot sustain the room capacity necessary to adequately care for the medical needs of their given community.

The rapid deployment of additional federal resources would go a long way to alleviate and augment the local response as we continue to experience increases in COVID-19 cases. We appreciate your consideration of our requests and look forward to working with you to provide much needed relief to Texans.

Sincerely,



Michael Cloud  
Congressman  
27<sup>th</sup> District of Texas



Filemon Vela  
Congressman  
34<sup>th</sup> District of Texas