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April 7, 2020

The Honorable Peter T. Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Gaynor:

I write to express serious concerns related to the public-private partnerships FEMA is using to promote the supply of personal protective equipment needed to protect frontline health workers, first responders, and the people they serve during the outbreak of novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Florida.

On the April 3, 2020 Florida congressional delegation briefing call, the Agency confirmed comments made by Rear Admiral John Polowczyk at the White House briefing the day before: 80 percent of the supplies brought to America from abroad as part of an operation known as Project Airbridge will be turned over to private vendors. Once this happens, FEMA is cut off from the last and most crucial step of the supply chain: putting protective equipment in the hands of frontline responders.

I am concerned that the current system is dumping vast quantities of medical supplies into a broken supply chain that has been unable to deliver equipment where it is needed most. Over the past three weeks, Florida Division of Emergency Management Director Jared Moskowitz placed several orders totaling millions of N95 respirator masks through multiple well-established medical suppliers, including 3M and its authorized distributors. In the best case, orders were partially filled. In the worst case, orders go unfilled and distributors are unable to provide information about when or if masks will ever arrive. Director Moskowitz described his search for masks as “chasing a ghost.”

Last week, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General released a survey of hospital administrators who are responding to the COVID-19 crisis. In response to the Inspector General, “hospitals reported that the supply chain for medical equipment had been disrupted because of increased demand for PPE from health care providers and others around the country.” The survey found that hospitals are resorting to unvetted suppliers, paying higher prices, reusing disposable supplies, and seeking out non-medical-grade protective equipment.

Shortages of personal protective equipment is endangering frontline health workers and in turn threatening the supply of those workers in our hospitals. Nurses across six states, including Florida, protested the unsafe conditions for workers and patients due to PPE shortages. One nurse in Texas said, “When we are infected, no one is safe. When we are infected, we become a real danger of infecting everyone else around us, patients, hospital staff, and a risk to our own families.”

While I appreciate the formation of the Supply Chain Stabilization Task Force, I am concerned that FEMA is not doing enough to ensure that these supplies arrive at the bedside, patrol vehicles, and ambulances where they are needed.

To protect our health workers and first responders from coronavirus infection, please respond to the following questions and requests for information:

1. Please provide a detailed list of all supplies brought to, or scheduled to be brought to, the United States through Project Airbridge.
2. Please provide a detailed list of all supplies delivered to, or scheduled to be delivered to, private vendors through Project Airbridge.
3. Please provide a detailed list of all supplies delivered to, or scheduled to be delivered to, health care providers, state, county, and local government entities through Project Airbridge.
4. Please provide a detailed list of all supplies delivered to, or scheduled to be delivered to, any other person or entity through Project Airbridge.
5. Does FEMA track supplies after they are delivered to private vendors? If so, please provide a detailed description of tracking procedures and protocols.
6. Are private vendors required to provide any information about the transport, sale, or delivery of supplies provided to them by Project Airbridge? If so, please provide a detailed description of such information provided to FEMA by private vendors.
7. Please describe all the ways FEMA is working with other government agencies or private manufacturers, distributors, and other supply companies to (a) track personal protective equipment within the domestic supply chain, (b) prevent price gouging, and (c) verify that protective equipment reaches frontline responders?

I ask that you work urgently with all partner agencies and the White House Coronavirus Task Force to ensure vital personal protective equipment ends up in the hands of those who are risking their lives to save Americans from COVID-19. As partners with the federal government in the response to the COVID-19 crisis, the private sector must be held to the highest standards of transparency and accountability.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ted Deutch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ted" and last name "Deutch" clearly legible.

Ted Deutch
MEMBER OF CONGRESS