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Dear Representative:

My name is Steven Reaves and I am the President of the At Large Local of FEMA workers across the country. I represent emergency responders, firefighters, and safety officers at FEMA charged with protecting the American public in times of crisis. At FEMA, we serve and protect the American public during national disasters including the recent COVID-19 public health crisis. I am a veteran and a safety officer. I took my oath as a veteran and as a safety officer for FEMA. I am proud to serve the American public.

I write to urge you to ensure the health and safety of frontline workers so they can protect the American public as you work to draft future coronavirus legislation. The health and safety of workers on the frontlines cannot wait. What I am seeing on the ground is that there is a desperate lack of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Utilizing Authority of the Defense Production Act and Establishing a Manufacturing and Distribution Target

I ask that you urge the Administration to fully utilize the authorities of the Defense Production Act (DPA). We must manufacture, allocate, distribute and provide adequate personal protective equipment to all our frontline workers including healthcare workers, first responders, including our members at FEMA, law enforcement officers, firefighters, grocery, retail and delivery workers and other workers tasked with serving the American public in this difficult time. We will not flatten the curve unless every front-line worker in the public and private sector who has a job where telework is not available has access to appropriate personal protective equipment. A minimum PPE manufacturing and distribution target should be prescribed by law for all categories of frontline workers, similar to the target established for health care workers in the "Medical Supply Chain Emergency Act of 2020" which is an excellent start and prototype to follow for first responders and other frontline workers. We need similar bills to cover these other front-line workers.

Creating Stronger PPE Reporting Requirements

Please work to ensure that all federal employees at risk of SARS-CoV-2 exposure through work duties have appropriate types and quantities of personal protective equipment (PPE). Federal employees in numerous occupations face significant risks of exposure to COVID-19 on a daily basis, including health care personnel, first responders, airport screeners, cafeteria workers, OSHA inspectors, commissary workers and FEMA workers. Transparency about PPE inventory and consistent guidelines about PPE requirements based on job duties are both sorely lacking across agencies.

The lack of transparency regarding PPE access and distribution at the national and local levels causes chaos, confusion, and mismanagement at many agencies. Employees in need of PPE are lacking adequate information to determine whether they will be protected and whether effective and appropriate PPE will be distributed through an evidence-based system rather than through an arbitrary and unfair process. Additionally, agencies must be held accountable for violations of





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OSHA requirements. Stronger reporting requirements will deter agencies from refusing to comply with OSHA requirements and encourage them to train managers and work with union health and safety officers. Agency PPE policies are lacking in uniformity and many have not been updated to reflect rapidly changing information about SARS-CoV-2 exposure. Employees who are concerned about exposure, have questions about testing and quarantines, or other health issues related to COVID-19 are not getting adequate support from their facility employee health units.

I urge you to require frequent comprehensive reporting of production, distribution and direction given on use of PPE. Specifically, every agency that employs personnel performing duties that involve potential hazardous exposure to COVID-19 or other pandemic virus must report to Congress within 30 days of enactment, and every 60 days thereafter the following information: (a) PPE inventory data including supplies on order; (b) PPE distribution plan by (i) type of PPE and (ii) position including identified hazard activity pursuant to 29 CFR 1910.134 as applicable.

If a change in PPE results in a reduction in protection indicated by an agency hazard assessment, the agency must be required to report the date and nature of the change and dates of required recertification of employee PPE training requirements.

In addition, both OSHA and individual agencies must be required to report to Congress the number of OSHA complaints related to PPE filed during the 60-day period prior to enactment and every 30 days thereafter.

Each plan should clearly state the reason, by position, that PPE will or will not be provided and why specific types of PPE are being provided. Each agency must be required to develop and provide to Congress a plan for PPE distribution based on position and job duties. This plan should address health status including PPE needs according to employee preexisting conditions and required medical documentation of such conditions, as well as the use of personal PPE.

The inspector general of each agency must be required to: (i) review the capacity, intake and policies of employee health units; (ii) review the validity of agency workplace injury and illness data related to COVID-19 exposure; and (iii) submit reports to Congress 60 days after enactment.

Thank you for your continued support of federal workers. We look forward to working with you.

Thank you,

Steven James Reaves

Steven J Reaves
President, AFGE National Local 4060
FEMA's Union

