

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 6, 2020

Peter T. Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Gaynor:

We write to express our frustration with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and to request that the agency, along with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), help Massachusetts meet the growing and urgent demands of the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health emergency by immediately providing additional ventilators to health care providers in the Commonwealth. Massachusetts is expected to experience a spike in COVID-19 cases and a subsequent surge in patients requiring hospitalization, intensive care, and intubation in the coming days and weeks. We urge you to fulfill ventilator requests submitted by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health without delay.

Massachusetts currently has a total of 12,500 confirmed cases of novel coronavirus infection and 231 deaths from COVID-19, and the virus is expected to peak in the coming days, infecting between 47,000 and 172,000 residents—or up to 2.5% of the population.¹ Governor Baker recently announced projections showing that a COVID-19 surge in hospitalizations is expected between April 10th and April 20th, and that the state could see up to 2,580 COVID-19 deaths.² We have heard from hospitals in the state that they will run out of invasive ventilators in a matter of days and will run out of other ventilators that can be adapted for use for COVID-19 patients within a week.

It is our understanding that Massachusetts officials have requested 1,700 ventilators from FEMA. FEMA officials have indicated to congressional staff that FEMA and its HHS counterparts plan to provide only 100 ventilators at this time and has not confirmed when these devices will arrive in the Commonwealth. Given the growing need in Massachusetts, approving and sending only 100 ventilators to Massachusetts is grossly insufficient, and FEMA can and must do more to help Massachusetts during this crisis. The Administration currently has over 9,000 total ventilators available in the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) and over the past week has distributed these

¹ WBUR, “Baker Upping Health Care Resources As COVID-19 Models Predict Up To 172,000 Total Mass. Cases,” Laney Ruckstuhl, April 2, 2020, <https://www.wbur.org/commonhealth/2020/04/02/governor-massachusetts-curve-model-coronavirus>; Massachusetts Department of Public Health, “Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19),” April 5, 2020, <https://www.mass.gov/doc/covid-19-cases-in-massachusetts-as-of-april-5-2020/download>.

² NBC 10, “Mass. Preparing for April Coronavirus Surge, Up to 172k Cases Expected,” April 2, 2020, <https://www.nbcBoston.com/news/local/gov-baker-to-provide-coronavirus-update-after-sharp-increase-in-statewide-deaths/2101240/>.

lifesaving machines to five other states.³ Additionally, the Department of Defense is reportedly awaiting instructions from FEMA and the Department of Health and Human Services to provide an additional 2,000 ventilators as needed.⁴

In order to address the shortage of ventilators in Massachusetts, and to prevent the catastrophic effect a shortage will have on hospitals, patients and communities across the Commonwealth, we ask that you immediately grant requests submitted by Massachusetts and provide needed ventilators to the state. We also ask that you provide answers to the following questions by no later than April 15, 2020.

1. Initially, the federal government told Massachusetts that it would send 1,000 ventilators to the state, but then only approved 100.⁵ Why did FEMA only approve a fraction of the ventilators needed in Massachusetts, and why did it initially tell the state it was sending more ventilators?
2. When does FEMA plan to approve the additional ventilators requested by the state to ensure that Massachusetts receives its full request of 1,700? If FEMA plans to send fewer total ventilators than requested by the state, why does it disagree with the analysis of projected need conducted by DPH? Given that this the surge likely to start this week, when can Massachusetts expect these additional devices to arrive?
3. If FEMA does not provide additional ventilators, Massachusetts is likely to deplete its supply of ventilators in the coming days. If FEMA is unable or unwilling to meet Massachusetts' needs, will you be connecting state leadership, hospitals, and other health care providers in the Commonwealth with manufacturers or sellers who have excess supplies?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

³ FEMA, “FEMA Advisory: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic,” April 3, 2020.

⁴ CNN, “Pentagon says it still hasn’t sent ventilators because it hasn’t been told where to send them,” Barbara Starr and Zachary Cohen, March 31, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/31/politics/pentagon-ventilators/index.html>.

⁵ Boston Globe, “Baker says 1,000 ventilators en route to Mass. as coronavirus cases surge,” Matt Stout, Jazmine Ulloa, and Travis Anderson, March 30, 2020, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/03/30/metro/baker-says-feds-are-planning-send-state-1000-generators/>.

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