

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904

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ON INTELLIGENCE

February 27, 2020

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As the coronavirus that originated in Wuhan, China, continues to spread abroad, I write today to urge the Administration to take strong actions to protect the health of Americans here at home. While I applaud the Administration for prompt containment efforts, notably restricting travel from China and invoking quarantine authorities for the first time in over 50 years, we must continue to prioritize response and preparedness efforts to protect Americans, particularly as the strategy expands not only to focus on containment but also mitigation.

In testimony this week before a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee, Secretary Azar outlined several priorities for an appropriate government response, including thorough identification and surveillance efforts, robust support for state and local government, investment in vaccine and therapeutic research and development, and identifying and preparing for potential supply chain challenges. While I am confident there will be bipartisan support in Congress to promptly devote the financial resources needed to meet this challenge, it is essential that there be a clear understanding of the specific funding needs if we are going to be able to unite, avoid partisanship, and give public health agencies the proper tools they need to respond.

The Maine CDC Director told me this week that the State of Maine is prepared and ready to assist in the COVID-19 response, but they require prompt resources to do so effectively. The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials estimates that \$3.1 billion in federal resources will be needed for the immediate coronavirus response, including giving state and local health departments the tools they need to prepare and respond to this threat. As a member of the Appropriations Committee, I stand ready to advocate for the level of resources needed to respond to coronavirus and protect public health.

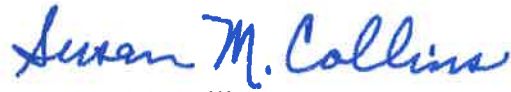
As Chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, I am also concerned that older adults abroad appear to be the group most affected by this outbreak in terms of mortality. I represent the oldest state in the country by median age. During a surge capacity event like an outbreak, older adults and those with chronic medical conditions are at particular risk. In recognition of age and health conditions affecting susceptibility, I urge the Administration to consider the unique health needs of the more than 50 million older Americans, from hospital preparedness to the impact of drug shortages to vaccine development.

Finally, I stress the immediate need from the Administration for timely and accurate communication with the public. I understand many uncertainties about the virus remain, but we know it is a serious threat that has the ability to spread easily and can be deadly. There have been inconsistencies in Administration answers this week to questions concerning the response to this outbreak, including identifying threat levels and forecasts about vaccine development. As

Vice President Pence begins to oversee the federal coronavirus response, I reiterate the need for effective coordination and leadership across all agencies and departments.

I look forward to working with the Administration to combat this virus, as effectively as possible, both at home and abroad.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan M. Collins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "M".

Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator