



**One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515**

December 17, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Mr. Wolf:

I write again to express my profound concern regarding the rise in the number of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employees infected with COVID-19 and urge the Department to provide its employees with access to testing. I am also concerned about whether the Department has adequately prepared to provide employees with access to COVID-19 vaccines now that they are becoming available.

I first wrote to you in July after DHS reached a record high number of employees that had tested positive or were in quarantine since the Department began regularly reporting such data to the Committee.¹ Unfortunately, these numbers have continued to increase at an alarming rate. DHS has reported a new record number of confirmed COVID-19 cases among its employees each week this month, bringing the current number of cases to more than double that reported to the Committee in July.

While I recognize that many of the Department's employees are on the front lines and that infection rates have increased across the nation, it appears that the Department is failing to take simple steps to limit transmission of the virus. Specifically, I understand that the Department is not testing employees who conduct mission-essential travel and, therefore, are at a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19.

For example, Federal Air Marshals within the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) continue to fly to protect us against terrorist attacks. Without sufficient testing, they risk not only contracting the virus but spreading it to others. Additionally, since August, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has deployed over 500 officers from across the United States to the southwest border to temporarily assist the U.S. Border Patrol despite objections to this plan, which I share.²

¹ Letter from Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security to the Honorable Chad F. Wolf, Department of Homeland Security, July 11, 2020.

² Letter from Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, and Kathleen M. Rice, Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Border Security, Facilitation, and Operations to the Honorable Chad F. Wolf,

Tragically, at least 26 employees at TSA and CBP have already passed away from COVID-19. These components also continue to account for a majority of the Department's COVID-19 cases—74 percent of active cases and 68 percent of overall cases.

It is troubling that some employees who conduct mission-essential travel have to rely on local health resources if they need a test, even though DHS recently awarded four contracts worth a potential total of \$2 billion to support testing throughout the Department and its components.³ It is the Department's responsibility to ensure the health and safety of its frontline employees and their equal access to reliable testing capabilities nationwide. This is critical since testing capacity at many local facilities has been overwhelmed by the surge in cases across the United States.⁴

To enable the Committee to better understand how DHS will protect the health and safety of its employees, I request that the Department provide the following information no later than December 30, 2020:

1. DHS's plan to utilize the newly awarded contracts to support testing throughout the Department and its components;
2. Information on each component's testing regime, particularly for frontline employees; and
3. The Department and each component's plans for providing its employees access to the COVID-19 vaccine, including an explanation for how vaccinations will be prioritized based on job description or location.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Chairman

Department of Homeland Security, and Mark A. Morgan, Chief Operating Officer and Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, July 15, 2020.

³ COVID-19 Testing Solutions, Combined Synopsis/Solicitation, Notice ID 70RDAD20R00000012, <https://beta.sam.gov/opp/85f2c41c66eb45b4bb063a0a32484d02/view>, and USAspending.gov, https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT_IDV_70RDAD21D00000001_7001, https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT_IDV_70RDAD21D00000002_7001, https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT_IDV_70RDAD21D00000003_7001, https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT_IDV_70RDAD21D00000004_7001.

⁴ William Marx, *Covid-19 testing capacity strained by surge in demand*, NBC News, Dec. 5, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/covid-19-testing-capacity-strained-surge-demand-n1249592>.