



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Emergency Preparedness, Response, & Recovery Subcommittee Chairman Donald Payne Jr. (D-NJ)

Community Perspectives on Coronavirus Preparedness and Response

March 10, 2020

We are at a critical point in responding to the coronavirus crisis that is facing our nation. Americans are concerned. Hundreds of Americans are sick. Sadly, there are families mourning the loss of loved ones from the coronavirus and our hearts are with them.

The nation is seeing cases on the rise and experts say the outbreak is getting worse. In New Jersey, at least two dozen schools are closing for coronavirus preparations and we have seen an increase of presumed cases. State and local governments are working tirelessly to limit the spread of the coronavirus in our communities.

At the Federal level, we have seen our experts at the CDC and other agencies working to address this issue. Unfortunately, we have also seen Federal officials offer mixed messages on the seriousness of the coronavirus.

We are not here today to point fingers, but we must tell the truth. The American public needs to be able to trust the information coming from all levels of government. It is now more important than ever for our leaders to trust science and speak with clarity and precision so that Americans can trust what they are hearing.

It is unhelpful to the outbreak response for Administration staff to state, as recently as last week, that the virus is contained when we know that is not true because cases are on the rise.

Another point of confusion with the Administration lies in the test kits. While the experts at CDC and even Vice President Pence have expressed concern about potential testing shortages, the President, on the hand has dismissed these worries.

There have been reports of the White House rejecting the advice of the CDC and even going so far as “muzzling” experts. These reports are troubling. Let’s be clear. I want the Federal response to the coronavirus to be robust.

No one is rooting for failure, but what I have seen is leading me to be very concerned.

With that said, the goal of today’s hearing is to understand what we as members of Congress can do to minimize the coronavirus outbreak for the American public. We need to hear today how Congress can support state and locals in preventing the spread of this virus.

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Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978