

December 2, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building, H-222
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, H-230
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Republican Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, H-204
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Democratic Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, S-221
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the American Nurses Association (ANA), we thank the United States Congress for its efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. As Congress finishes its work for the 116th session, we urge you to pass additional legislation to respond to the unprecedented public health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. A continued delay will prevent the ability of our nation's nurses and other health care providers to perform their jobs to the fullest extent possible and keep not only their patients safe, but themselves, their families, and communities safe as well.

Registered nurses (RNs) have been, and continue to be, on the front lines of fighting COVID-19 and saving patients' lives. They are risking their own lives fighting this virus, 405 RNs in the United States having tragically died thus far. Despite hopes that strong mitigation and containment actions in our communities would reduce the severity of the coronavirus outbreak, the nation is currently seeing a third wave in COVID-19 cases.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Decontamination

Presently, PPE is not being provided in the quantity or quality that is required for nurses to safely care for patients. ANA's August survey on access to PPE received 21,000 responses. Forty-two percent of respondents reported PPE shortages in their facility, and eighty-eight percent said they are required, or encouraged, to reuse single use PPE, such as N95 masks. Sixty-two percent of these respondents said they feel unsafe using decontaminated respirators¹.

While many health care facilities are reporting adequate supplies of PPE, many of our nurses across states and facilities are reporting that is because of emergency standards to have them reuse and decontaminate PPE. The decontamination processes are being approved by Emergency Use

¹ <https://www.nursingworld.org/news/news-releases/2020/new-survey-findings-from-21k-us-nurses--ppe-shortages-persist-re-use-practices-on-the-rise-amid-covid-19-pandemic/>

Authorizations and have not been backed up by data to determine safety or how many times they can be decontaminated before PPE integrity is diminished.²

ANA recommends that Congress engage with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration regarding the need to expeditiously research the effectiveness of various decontamination methods for the reuse of PPE by nurses and other health care professionals.

Defense Production Act

As you are aware, the President has used the Defense Production Act (DPA) to produce ventilators, keep meat packing plants open, and produce certain types of PPE. However, the DPA was not used to its fullest extent. This has led to even more shortages and increased competition among states to attain PPE. In some cases, the PPE that states and individual health systems procured was ineffective or counterfeit.

ANA urges passage of the Medical Supply Chain Emergency Act of 2020, legislation which would require the federal government to immediately ramp up manufacturing of medical supplies and create a coordinated procurement and distribution process to states and health care facilities.

Public Health Infrastructure

The public health infrastructure and the workforce has been underfunded for decades. Federal funds for state, local, and tribal public health preparedness were cut from \$940 million in 2002³ to \$675 million in 2019. During the same time period, health care emergency preparedness was cut by nearly fifty percent, from \$515 million in 2004 to \$265 million in 2019. It is vital that our nation is better equipped with preparedness and response measures, not only during the time of crisis, but to address the overall health and well-being of our population.

We ask that you include measures that appropriately address public health infrastructure and workforce, by providing \$100 million to fund infrastructure development for community-based care, including teaching health centers and mental health centers. We also urge you to provide \$500 million to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to improve the capabilities of the agency and public health departments relating to information technology and data systems.

Vaccinations

Vaccines are critical to the control and prevention of infectious disease transmission. As the voice of the nation's nurses, ANA has established key principles to guide nurses and other health care professionals' consideration for COVID-19 vaccines. The nation's nursing workforce will play a critical role in education of the public and the administration of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, including within the healthcare professions.

When safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines are made available, ANA strongly recommends that nurses are prioritized to be vaccinated according to current recommendations for immunization of health care

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/with-protective-equipment-shortages-lingering-health-facilities-turn-to-mask-cleaning-system/2020/07/06/52cd7314-bc9b-11ea-8cf5-9c1b8d7f84c6_story.html

³ <https://www.tfah.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TFAH2020PublicHealthFunding.pdf>

professionals by the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). This will be necessary to build public trust in the vaccines developed for COVID-19.

The federal government must provide state and local public health agencies and jurisdictions sufficient resources and funding to support mass distribution and administration when a COVID-19 vaccine is approved and available.

I encourage you to work in a bipartisan manner to pass comprehensive legislation that will provide protection for our nation's frontline health care workers. We look forward to continuing to work with you to protect the health of our nation and stand ready to serve as a resource.

Sincerely,



Debbie D. Hatmaker, PhD, RN, FAAN
Acting Chief Executive Officer/Chief Nursing Officer

cc: Ernest Grant, PhD, RN, FAAN, ANA President