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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025

<http://appropriations.senate.gov>

March 13, 2020

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf, Acting Commissioner Morgan, and Acting Director Albence:

I write to request information about the policies and procedures that the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have in place to prepare for and contain a potential outbreak of coronavirus in their facilities holding and detaining tens of thousands of immigrants and asylum seekers. Public health and medical experts have been sounding the alarm that a novel coronavirus outbreak is “inevitable” in the U.S. immigration system.¹ These experts are warning that “when COVID-19 arrives in a community, it will show up in jails and prisons,”² which in turn are especially “conducive for the spread of diseases.”³ A recent 2018 outbreak of mumps in our immigration detention centers – which exploded from five to 900 cases among detainees and staff in *less than a year* – is a sobering, instructive example.⁴

Given that tens of thousands of people are held and housed in CBP and ICE facilities, and thousands more work in, visit, or travel through these facilities, the rapid spread of coronavirus in our immigration system is a crisis waiting to happen. It is therefore critical that CBP and ICE have a systematic plan to help prevent such an outbreak in these facilities, and to provide monitoring, testing, and treatment to those who may be or are infected.

To understand what your agencies are doing to protect public health and mitigate the threat posed by COVID-19 to those detained and working in our immigration facilities, please answer the following questions within a week of receiving this letter:

1. What policies, procedures, and/or guidance do DHS, CBP, and ICE have in place to identify, treat, and prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus within the detained

¹ *Coronavirus inevitable in prison-like US immigration centers, doctors say*, THE GUARDIAN, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/11/coronavirus-outbreak-us-immigration-centers>.

² Dr. Homer Venters, *4 ways to protect our jails and prisons from coronavirus*, THE HILL, available at <https://thehill.com/opinion/criminal-justice/485236-4-ways-to-protect-our-jails-and-prisons-from-coronavirus>.

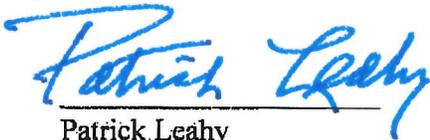
³ Deanna Paul, *New York City Eyes Measures to Stop Virus Spread to Jails*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-york-city-eyes-measures-to-stop-virus-spread-to-jails-11583883818> (March 10, 2020).

⁴ *Coronavirus inevitable in prison-like US immigration centers, doctors say*, THE GUARDIAN, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/11/coronavirus-outbreak-us-immigration-centers>.

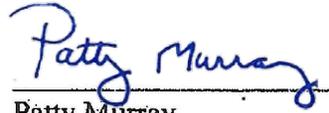
population and among visitors, staff, and their families? Please provide copies of all relevant documents.

2. What specific plans are in place regarding specifically vulnerable populations, including but not limited to senior citizens, pregnant women, and people with compromised immune systems and chronic illnesses?
3. What mechanisms are under consideration or in place to track, collect, and publicize data on the spread of coronavirus of people in DHS custody?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this urgent matter.



Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations



Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies