

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 10, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, health systems throughout the Rio Grande Valley have expertly prepared to adapt and respond to South Texans' needs. Unfortunately, with recent surges in COVID-19 cases over the past several weeks, our health systems have been pushed to their limits. Even with retrofitting facilities, implementing new delivery methods for health services, and expending resources to increase capacity – additional financial and personnel support are needed from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

On June 1, 2020 there were 218 net positive cases in Hidalgo County; there are now 4,375 active cases and resultant hospitalizations have increased by over 1000%. Health systems and local officials in Cameron, Hidalgo, and Starr Counties are doing all they can to support and expand operations in South Texas. However, as of July 9, 2020, 9 of the 12 hospital emergency departments in the Rio Grande Valley are diverting patients due to high volume. COVID-19 cases in South Texas are at their highest peak since the pandemic began, with no indication that case counts will level out soon. While state and local jurisdictions continue utilizing every resource to support our health systems, dispatching supplies and personnel, our healthcare providers remain wholly overwhelmed.

Providers in our region have urgently requested additional staffing and a myriad of medical supplies including oxygen, ventilators, personal protective equipment, and dialysis machines as well as additional facilities to enhance critical care and discharge capacity. To quote a local hospital administrator, "we cannot wait 30 days". As such, we write to ask for support in the form of a Federal Medical Station, or similar facility, to be established as soon as possible. We understand that your Department recently approved a Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT) to assess the situation in the Rio Grande Valley and potentially stand up a Federal Medical Station. We also ask that HHS act swiftly to allocate another tranche of hotspot funding for areas, like the Rio Grande Valley, that have experienced surges after the April 10th and June 10th cutoffs.

The Department's efforts thus far, including the surge testing site in Edinburg, Texas are greatly appreciated. The rapid deployment of federal resources would go a long way to alleviate and augment the local response as we continue to experience increases in COVID-19 cases. We appreciate your consideration of our requests and look forward to working with you to provide much needed relief to South Texas.

Sincerely,



John Cornyn
U.S. Senator



Ted Cruz
U.S. Senator



Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress



Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress



Filemon Vela
Member of Congress