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July 13, 2020

The Honorable Kim Reynolds
Governor of Iowa
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50319

Dear Governor Reynolds,

Iowans living in independent, assisted, nursing, skilled nursing, long-term, and other congregate living facilities across Iowa need improved access to COVID-19 tests. Unfortunately, the TestIowa locations are inaccessible for many of our seniors and there has been a lack of tests provided directly to senior-living facilities.

I am writing to request that you: 1) create a mobile TestIowa option specifically for seniors and others living in congregate facilities; 2) work to increase the number of tests provided to these living facilities for residents and staff; and, 3) provide no less than weekly data reporting on all senior congregate living facilities, including reporting the number of tests for residents and staff, positive cases, and other relevant information. Additionally, data regarding testing, cases, and death rate, specifically for long term care facilities, has been moved or removed from [Coronavirus.Iowa.Gov](https://www.coronavirus.iowa.gov). I request that this data be restored and remain publicly accessible.

We are all aware that our seniors are at the highest risk of serious illness from COVID-19. Moreover, seniors that have an underlying health issue are at an even higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the majority of COVID-19 deaths have been in those over the age of 60.¹ The CDC has also stated that, “nursing home populations are at the highest risk of being affected by COVID-19”.² Those above the age of 65, living with a preexisting medical condition, and living in a group setting are the highest at-risk category for serious illness and death.

Iowa statistics bear similarities to these national numbers. The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) states the “elderly and those with chronic health conditions remain the most vulnerable to serious illness from COVID-19.”³ Of the 752 COVID-19 deaths in Iowa, 87% have been among those aged 61 years or older.⁴ Data that was previously available on

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ‘National Center for Health Statistics Daily Updates for July 9, 2020’ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/index.htm> Accessed July 8th, 2020

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ‘Nursing Homes & Long-Term Care Facilities’ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/long-term-care.html> Accessed July 9th, 2020

³ Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH), ‘Emerging Health Issues’ <https://idph.iowa.gov/emerging-health-issues/novel-coronavirus>

⁴ Iowa.gov, ‘COVID-19 in Iowa. Outcome Analysis (Deaths)’ <https://coronavirus.iowa.gov/pages/outcome-analysis-deaths> Accessed July 13th, 2020

coronavirus.iowa.gov, and reported in statewide media, showed that the state had confirmed at least 905 positive cases within long-term care facilities, with 356 deaths reported on June 22nd.⁵ This means that for our Iowans in long-term care facilities, COVID-19 has a mortality rate of nearly 40% – 17 times higher than Iowa’s current mortality rate.⁶ Data on the cumulative total of positive cases in long-term care facilities was moved or removed from the online dashboard, and I was unable to find the most up-to-date number past July 7th.

Despite an abundance of evidence our seniors are most at risk, they have inadequate access to testing. As of July 9th, over 350,000 Iowans have been tested. However, no data was available on how many tests have been conducted on those who are over the age of 80 or between the ages of 61-80. I am deeply concerned testing for Iowa’s seniors is not a priority, and current levels do not match the dire risk factors that this pandemic poses to them.

That is why I am calling on you to create a mobile TestIowa strike team dedicated to our seniors and other congregate living communities struggling to access these resources. I’ve spoken to seniors from my district who have been exposed to COVID-19 through staff or other residents, but despite meeting the criteria for needing a test, the TestIowa sites are inaccessible or unavailable because of distance and travel time.

We must also be providing our senior living facilities with adequate tests for both residents and staff. Ensuring regular access to testing among our most vulnerable populations and those who care for them will help control the spread of the virus and provide peace of mind to residents, staff, and families.

Additionally, on April 19, 2020 the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released updated guidance that would require nursing homes to report cases directly to the CDC. Although Iowa reports daily data on COVID-19 cases in long-term care facilities, you have not required the daily reporting of cases in nursing homes or other congregate settings. I am requesting that you release nursing home COVID-19 data, as is already done for assisted living. This information will help better understand outbreaks of COVID-19 and the impact this pandemic is having on our most vulnerable, as well as provide seniors and their families with a better understanding of the risks of COVID-19.

While I did not receive a reply to my last letter to you regarding lack of testing sites in Iowa, I hope that future announcements to expand TestIowa to help Iowa’s seniors and other residents will be considered a top priority.⁷ Even with additional sites added over the past month, there are

⁵ Iowa Capital Dispatch, “Iowa tops 26,000 COVID cases, but outbreak may be slowing,” June 22, 2020 <https://iowacapitaldispatch.com/2020/06/22/iowa-tops-26000-covid-cases-but-outbreak-may-be-slowing/>

⁶ Iowa.gov, ‘COVID-19 in Iowa. Outcome Analysis (Deaths)’ <https://coronavirus.iowa.gov/pages/outcome-analysis-deaths> Accessed July 9th, 2020

⁷ “In Letter to Gov. Reynolds, Reps. Axne, Finkenauer, Loebsack Share Concerns, Urge Expansion of ‘Test Iowa’ Coronavirus Testing Program. Letter dated May 19th <https://axne.house.gov/media/press-releases/letter-gov-reynolds-reps-axne-finkenauer-loebsack-share-concerns-urge-expansion>

still 80 counties without a testing location – and I continue to hear from constituents with concerns about the distance and time required to receive the test they have been promised.⁸

As one of Iowa's Representatives in Congress, I am prepared to fight for any additional resources that our state and its public health officials need to prepare us for the next phase of this public health emergency. I encourage you and your team to keep us informed of what you may need from federal COVID-19 response efforts to best meet these testing and mitigation demands.

I respectfully request a reply to this letter by Friday, July 17th, as this is an urgent matter and older Iowans deserve to know what steps will be taken to protect them.

Sincerely,



Cindy Axne
Member of Congress

⁸ TestIowa <https://www.testiowa.com/en> Accessed July 7th, 2020