

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

May 19, 2020

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

Dear Governor Reynolds,

On April 21, 2020, you announced the launch of Test Iowa, an initiative that promised to increase testing capacity in our state by 3,000 tests per day. The program, with a price tag of \$26 million, was made possible with federal block grant money Iowa received from the CARES Act along with state funding and private hospital investment. We appreciate your focus on and investment in COVID-19 testing. As members of Congress who are invested in both expanded testing and wise use of taxpayer dollars, we write to request information on when Test Iowa will achieve full capacity and reach an expanded number of sites across our state.

We are concerned that Test Iowa still has not yielded 3,000 tests per day several weeks after its launch nor are there Test Iowa locations in “hotspot” areas. The fact that positive cases are increasing while our testing capabilities remain limited is deeply concerning. As our economy has begun to reopen, we know that Iowans will feel safer if they can access a test quickly and within their communities. We need to ensure that essential workers, nursing homes, and those who believe they have been exposed can get tests right away.

As you know, Iowa is seeing increased coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreaks. Nationally, Iowa has some of the top cities for new outbreaks and new positive COVID-19 cases. The number of cases doubled from 5,000 to over 10,000 in less than two weeks and continues to increase each day.

Pottawattamie County has experienced a 418% increase with 33 cases on April 30 to 171 cases on May 18. The Council Bluffs - Omaha, Nebraska greater metro area represents nearly one million people, many of who travel across county and state lines each day as part of their daily commutes. Yet, there is no testing site to serve this large metropolitan area where cases are rising. This also hurts the counties surrounding it which are among the most rural in the state and rely on the Council Bluffs-Omaha metro area for health care access. Without access, these health care workers, first responders, essential workers, and individuals are traveling into other states or spending hours traveling to the closest location in Iowa where they can receive a test.

This is just one of the many areas severely impacted by COVID-19 that are without a testing site. While we understand that your team is making decisions on the data you have available, there is a clear geographic disparity.

While we understand that case numbers will go up as our testing capacity increases, the fact is that testing remains low. We have heard too many stories about Iowans who have gone to Illinois, Minnesota, and Nebraska to get a test – and those tests have come back positive. We have spoken with our health care workers and first responders who must travel hours to and from a testing site. For Test Iowa to be a worthwhile investment of federal dollars, we need to be sure that the initiative can achieve its intended volume of testing.

Additionally, we have heard from constituents who are waiting for days and even weeks to get their test results back. We are alarmed that some Iowans will never get their test results back because their Test Iowa tests were recently damaged. We have heard that the State Labs are prioritizing Test Iowa tests over tests coming in from hospitals, resulting in more delays. We want assurance that these issues are being addressed so that we have confidence in our testing and ensure it can expand.

We are asking for your written response about when Test Iowa will achieve 3,000 tests per day and your plans for expanded testing locations into large population centers and hotspots. We also request additional information about how you are continuing to address the implementation issues that have arisen with Test Iowa. Data should drive statewide decisions that impact Iowans' lives and health, but we need much more testing to get a full picture of that data. As our state reopens, testing is going to be essential to keep Iowans safe, and we look forward to working with you to ensure Test Iowa meets its objectives for the benefit of all our constituents.

We also ask that you provide an update on current contact tracing efforts in the state. With Iowa moving toward more re-openings statewide, individual contacts and exposure will increase, and it is more important than ever that Iowa have the capacity to track the contacts of those with a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19. How many contact tracers are currently active in Iowa, and what is the capacity of positive cases for Iowa's health department to effectively track? Has your administration been in contact with the Trump administration regarding resources to do contact tracing?

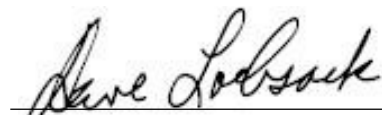
With positive cases today at 15,337 in Iowa, it is important that we have the infrastructure and ability to track positive cases and properly inform people about what to do if they test positive. Widespread testing and contact tracing are key to bringing the rate of positive cases down, and many public health experts have stressed the importance of increasing contact tracing to stop the spread of the virus and safely reopen America's communities and economy. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to our state during this time of crisis and we look forward to your reply.

As the funding for Test Iowa was made possible by Congress and as Iowan are contracting and dying from COVID-19 daily, please reply to this request within 48 hours as this is a matter of urgency.

Sincerely,


Cindy Axne
Member of Congress


Abby Finkenauer
Member of Congress


Dave Loebsack
Member of Congress