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## PAUL D. TONKO

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
20<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT, NEW YORK

April 8, 2020

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
CHAIR, SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT  
AND CLIMATE CHANGE  
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AND PUBLIC LANDS  
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE,  
AND TECHNOLOGY  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY

The Honorable Mike Pence  
Vice President of the United States  
The White House  
Office of the Vice President  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Vice President Pence:

As leader of the Coronavirus Task Force and chief advisor to President Trump on matters related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, I write to bring to your attention the challenges facing frontline healthcare workers in New York's Capital Region. I urge and plead with you to advise the President to take stronger federal action under the Defense Production Act to ensure the supply of critical materials adequately matches the needs of our brave healthcare workers.

Over the past few weeks, I have spoken numerous times with frontline healthcare workers, hospital administrators and public health directors across the Capital Region of New York about the challenges they are facing in responding to COVID-19. Workers in multiple hospitals in my district have detailed the challenges with gaining access to N95 masks<sup>1</sup>. All of the hospitals in my district have been forced to shut down COVID-19 testing in the community due to the shortage of available test kits.<sup>23</sup> The lack of widespread testing and proper personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline workers, especially those responding to the needs of vulnerable populations such as newborns, senior citizens, and those receiving palliative and hospice care, raise serious concerns about the Capital Region's ability to adequately measure and meet the generational challenge posed by COVID-19. While our hospitals, counties and our state are doing the best they can with the supplies they have been able to acquire, this is a challenge that no hospital or state would ever be able to respond to on its own. We should not be creating a "Hunger Games" marketplace of PPE for our healthcare workforce. Federal leadership is necessary and essential to both coordinate and distribute production of testing kits, PPE, and ventilators.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/Capital-Region-nurses-say-masks-protective-gear-15140157.php>

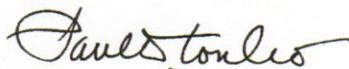
<sup>2</sup> <http://news.sphp.com/news/st-peters-health-partners-albany-med-to-limit-covid-19-testing-to-symptomatic-health-care-workers/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://dailygazette.com/article/2020/03/19/ellis-in-schenetady-st-mary-s-in-amsterdam-suspend-almost-all-covid-19-testing-as-others-run-short>

While I appreciate some steps the Administration has taken to increase supply of needed equipment, the overall effort has been insufficient. For example, I was proud to work together and have the Administration's support for legislation I authored to increase access to critically needed N95 respirators. These respirators will be more readily available for our frontline healthcare workers by adding NIOSH-certified respirators as a covered countermeasure for purposes of the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act. This legislation has already helped boost the supply of N95 masks, with leading manufacturer 3M increasing production from 5 million masks per month prior to the legislation passing to 31 million masks a month after the legislation passed.<sup>4</sup> Still, this increased output of N95 masks is insufficient to meet the demand of this pandemic and we are facing similar shortages in gowns, testing kits, and ventilators.

In order to meet the need for critical supplies in New York's Capital Region and across the country, I am urging that you advise the President to immediately invoke the Defense Production Act to compel the full and complete production of necessary amounts of PPE, testing kits, and ventilators.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul D. Tonko".

Paul D. Tonko  
Member of Congress

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/inside-americas-mask-crunch-a-slow-government-reaction-and-an-industry-wary-of-liability/2020/04/02/b3155e2a-6f85-11ea-aa80-c2470c6b2034\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/inside-americas-mask-crunch-a-slow-government-reaction-and-an-industry-wary-of-liability/2020/04/02/b3155e2a-6f85-11ea-aa80-c2470c6b2034_story.html)