

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 20, 2020

Governor Larry Hogan
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Governor Hogan,

Since the Maryland Department of Health began collecting and publicly releasing race, ethnicity, and zip code level data on Maryland cases of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), the data has clearly demonstrated that the virus is having a disproportionate impact on communities of color, specifically Black and Hispanic residents of our state. Now that we have a better understanding of the incidence and prevalence in these communities, we strongly urge you to use this data to guide future decisions on resource allocation and inform the development and implementation of a comprehensive public health plan to mitigate these disparate impacts.

For the 33,138 COVID-19 cases that have race and ethnicity data available as of May 19, nearly 38% of patients are Black and Black residents comprise more than 43% of COVID-related deaths, despite the fact that African Americans only make up 30% of the state's population. Similarly, despite only comprising 10% of the State's population, Hispanic Marylanders make up nearly 29% of positive COVID-19 cases. This data clearly confirms the disparate impact that COVID-19 is having on communities of color. Collecting and publicly releasing this data was an important first step, but now we need a bold and comprehensive plan to address the growing challenges facing areas like Prince George's and Montgomery Counties, as well as the Baltimore Region.

The State recognized the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 at nursing homes and other long-term care facilities and identified the public health risks associated with COVID-19 outbreaks among poultry processing plant workers on the Eastern Shore. In both cases, the State has rightly started to commit resources and develop policies to address infection rates among these populations. Similarly, the infection and mortality rates we are seeing among communities of color justify a targeted plan of action. Sadly, health disparities have long been a pervasive problem in many of our communities. However, this also means that we have evidence-based strategies and important community partners in place to inform a comprehensive state plan to help address disparities in the COVID-19 infection and mortality rates. Additionally, sufficient resources to perform consistent and adequate daily testing must be the cornerstone of this strategy to contain the COVID-19 virus in our state's hardest hit areas. Without adequate testing, it is impossible to know how pervasive the virus is in these communities, or to accurately measure the progress of our mitigation efforts. Given the importance of testing, we ask you to outline your plan for how the State intends to spend the more than \$205 million in federal funding Maryland received from the last COVID-19 relief law to expand statewide testing capacity, particularly in communities hardest hit by this pandemic.

We believe a critical element of any plan developed must seek to understand the unique needs and cultural and sociological differences of various communities in coordination with a trusted research partner. The plan should follow the lead of other states like New York and Michigan and integrate partnerships with trusted community-based organizations, such as churches and other members of the faith-based community, and bolster the existing public health workforce with members of these communities. Additionally, this plan needs to promote linkages to treatment and testing and ensure that it is accessible and available in locations where residents feel comfortable and safe. We believe that the more granular data aggregated by zip code will not only provide a better understanding of the actual risks of infection and mortality in different communities, but should also inform the State's response efforts to ensure testing, treatment, and other resources are targeted in the most effective way.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to working with you to address racial and ethnic disparities in this COVID-19 public health crisis.

Sincerely,

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
U.S. Senator

/s/ Anthony G. Brown

Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin

Benjamin L. Cardin
Member of Congress

/s/ Steny H. Hoyer

Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress

/s/ C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger

C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress

/s/ John P. Sarbanes

John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

/s/ Kweisi Mfume

Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress

/s/ Jamie Raskin

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

/s/ David Trone

David Trone
Member of Congress