

JAY INSLEE
Governor



STATE OF WASHINGTON
Office of the Governor

June 10, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Vice President:

I write to you at a critical moment in our nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are working at all levels of government to forge a pathway toward a safe and responsible recovery, conscious that our efforts will succeed or fail based on our collective ability to contain the virus. Central to that goal is ensuring access to personal protective equipment (PPE) for every American who needs it.

Unfortunately, we have fallen far short in addressing the shortages of PPE to date. We have watched with shame as so many healthcare workers across the nation — nurses, doctors, midwives, home health aides, janitors and cleaning staff, and more — have cared for their communities tirelessly without the protection they need and deserve. We have seen this pandemic spawn new categories of frontline workers: grocery store workers, transit operators, shelter staff, and other essential employees. These are hard-working Americans who never expected to be putting their lives on the line, but who have continued to serve their communities under dangerous and unprecedented circumstances. I have spoken directly with workers, businesses, and labor groups, and I know that the PPE shortages are widespread. It is our duty to address this challenge and ensure that all those in the workforce today and in the future have the equipment they need to protect themselves, their families, and their communities.

It is time for a new national mission to manufacture the medical supplies and equipment necessary to keep our people safe and prevent transmission of the virus. More than four months after the first U.S. coronavirus case was confirmed in our state, it is clear that the status quo is not working. The inadequacy of the federal stockpile, the overreliance on foreign suppliers, and the limited domestic production of PPE have meant that in our time of greatest need, our nation has been unable to adequately protect healthcare and other frontline workers. This must change.



Washington has exhausted every possible avenue to tackle this challenge. We worked closely with federal partners to make use of the Strategic National Stockpile and welcomed the limited distributions while they lasted. We have worked wherever possible with local companies to increase production of PPE in our state. We pivoted rapidly to the commercial market and began competing with other states and the federal government for limited supplies — driving up prices and fighting for the same products as our fellow Americans. We have scoured the globe and placed orders domestically and internationally for approximately \$400 million worth of PPE. To date, however, we have received less than 10 percent of that amount.

Today, we remain participants in an unnecessary, chaotic, 50-state scramble to secure badly needed PPE. The challenges that all states are facing include inadequate domestic production; narrow channels of producers for federally certified products – such as surgical masks and N95 respirators; intense pressure on the global supply chain; challenges with shipping and customs; and significant quality control problems with unknown producers abroad.

The central challenge, however, is the lack of a coordinated federal response to ensure PPE for every American who needs it. It is akin to fighting a war in which each state is responsible for procuring its own weapons and body armor. Our current situation will only become more dire as more businesses reopen and more Americans head back to work — putting additional strain on a system that is already unable to meet demand. States need the federal government to harness its power under the Defense Production Act and finally address the critical need for PPE, in much the same manner as it has done for ventilators and testing supplies. While the challenges we are facing are significant, they are far from insurmountable. This country can rise to the moment and meet its obligation to protect our people and our communities.

To address persistent shortages and ensure a safe reopening, the federal government should:

- Use the Defense Production Act to increase domestic PPE production necessary to meet current and projected needs for all workers in all sectors.
- Develop a comprehensive assessment of protection needs by industry, evaluate critical supply chain gaps in the U.S. manufacturing base, and work with Congress to support a resilient national medical industrial base.
- Provide more detailed and adequately protective federal guidance for workers across all categories, including comprehensive roadmaps for infection control across sectors.
- Create a national industry consultation program to provide technical assistance to employers on safely reconfiguring businesses, including administrative controls, engineering controls, and PPE, and establish a grant program for necessary expenditures with a focus on serving frontline workers and vulnerable and low-income populations.
- Replenish and expand the Strategic National Stockpile to prepare adequately for a future COVID-19 surge and other potential pandemic outbreaks.

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Increasing domestic production of PPE is both a public health and national security imperative. It is our responsibility to honor the sacrifice made by healthcare and other frontline workers to address these shortages now and avoid a similar fate in the future. Washington stands ready to partner with you on this and other issues as we continue working together to keep people safe.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Inslee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "I".

Jay Inslee
Governor