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April 7, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

The COVID-19 pandemic emergency poses unprecedented challenges for the American people, disrupting the lives and livelihoods of tens of millions in ways never before experienced. We appreciate the vital steps that your Department has taken to slow the spread and diminish the toll inflicted by the novel coronavirus. As you move forward with additional actions aimed at combating COVID-19, we ask that you use the tools and authorities available to the Department to identify, monitor, and analyze potential racial disparities in the prevalence, along with the hospitalization and mortality rates, of this disease.

In recent days, a number of concerning reports have emerged, suggesting that COVID-19 has had a particularly harmful impact on communities of color. Five counties in Florida, for instance, released figures illustrating higher hospitalization rates for African American and Latino patients. As of this past Monday, in Michigan, African Americans comprised 41% of recorded coronavirus-related fatalities and 33% of cases, despite accounting for just 14% of the state's population. In Louisiana, nearly three-fourths of COVID-19-related fatalities were of African Americans. These numbers, while preliminary, paint a troubling picture.

Unfortunately, these reports also point to a patchwork of demographic data that will inevitably hinder our ability to comprehensively analyze or assess disparities in order to aid in our response efforts. The federal government thus has a unique and useful role to play in spearheading or otherwise facilitating the collection of both granular and aggregate information on infections, hospitalizations, severe illness, and fatalities, among other key data points. As we develop a more robust understanding of how COVID-19 impacts different communities, as well as what underlying or associated factors may drive these differences, we can more effectively address the needs at hand and more aggressively combat this terrible disease, enabling us to better serve all Americans.

Sincerely,



TIM SCOTT
United States Senator

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