

United States Senate

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6400

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March 6, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

The novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, alarmingly continues to spread worldwide, and community transmission in the United States is now confirmed. As members of the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging, we write to highlight the unique health needs of the more than 50 million older adults in the United States in light of the Department's ongoing efforts to protect Americans from the COVID-19 outbreak.

As we heard this week at the Senate HELP Committee hearing, older adults and individuals with underlying health conditions are particularly susceptible to COVID-19. In addition, Dr. Nancy Messonnier, Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, confirmed in early February, "the data coming out of China continues to say that the people who are at higher risk for severe disease and death are those who are older and with underlying health conditions." According to a recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the COVID-19 case-fatality rate (CFR) among older patients was significantly higher – nearly fifteen percent in patients 80 and older and eight percent in patients ages 70-79 – than the CFR in the general patient population, which was less than three percent. The overall CFR may continue to fluctuate, but there is no doubt older adults can face a much more difficult prognosis if they are infected with COVID-19.

We are particularly concerned about community spread in the United States, given the fact that older adults abroad have been the most affected by this outbreak in terms of mortality. This is compounded by the developing situation at a nursing home in Kirkland, Washington. Older adults and those with chronic medical conditions are at particular risk and may require more attention than others during a surge capacity event such as a COVID-19 outbreak. In recognition of age and health conditions affecting susceptibility, it is important that the Department consider the unique health needs of older Americans in all aspects of the domestic response, from hospital preparedness to the impact of drug shortages to vaccine development.

We look forward to working with the Department to keep all Americans, including our nation's seniors, healthy.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
Chairman



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
Ranking Member



Rick Scott
United States Senator



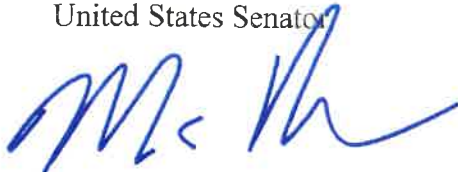
Doug Jones
United States Senator



Martha McSally
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



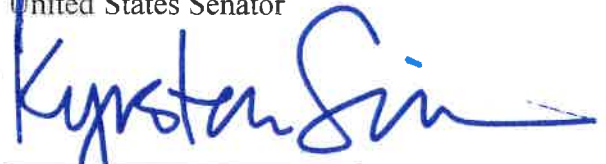
Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Tim Scott
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Mike Braun
United States Senator