

FRANK PALLONE, JR., NEW JERSEY
CHAIRMAN

GREG WALDEN, OREGON
RANKING MEMBER

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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Majority (202) 225-2927

Minority (202) 225-3641

May 12, 2020

The Honorable Anna Eshoo
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Eshoo,

I remain concerned that the majority continues to push forward with a hearing without providing any opportunity to work together with the minority in a bipartisan fashion, suggesting to me that the intent behind this upcoming hearing is not to get to the bottom of the whistleblower allegations in any meaningful way, but instead to engage in partisan politics, which will ultimately do a disservice to the whistleblower, the Department of Health and Human Services, this Committee, the American people, and our collective efforts to address COVID-19.

That said, I am yet again reaching out to offer up another hearing topic we could work on together to combat the worst public health crisis in a century. I write to request that the Committee on Energy and Commerce hold a hearing before the Health Subcommittee to discuss racial disparities related to COVID-19, and how the Congress can help reduce these disparities. I appreciated the efforts of Chairman Frank Pallone in organizing, in consultation with the minority, the May 1, 2020, tele-forum with Dr. Anne Schuchat, Principal Deputy Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on the issue of racial disparities. Building off the bipartisan work of Chairman Pallone, I believe now is the time to continue to work together, in the public forum of the Health Subcommittee, to further discuss these gaps in health services and outcomes related to COVID-19 in vulnerable populations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the most disruptive events in recent history. The United States has over a million recorded cases and is close to approaching 100,000 deaths.¹

¹ Johns Hopkins University, Coronavirus Resource Center, *available at* <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> (last updated on May 11, 2020).

This pandemic has hit communities of color particularly hard. Recent studies have shown that communities of color are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. According to recent studies, African Americans make up approximately 34 percent of the population exposed to COVID-19, and 27 percent of known COVID-19 deaths, yet only make up 13 percent of the total population in the United States.^{2,3} In comparison, Hispanics or Latinos are about 18 percent of the population, and 17 percent of deaths; and Americans of Asian descent make up about 6 percent of the population and 5 percent of deaths.⁴ Unfortunately, detailed demographic data on Native Americans is incredibly limited, but we have heard reports that Indian Country has also been ravaged by the virus. For example, the 350,000-resident Navajo Nation reservation has been reported as one of the “worst-of-the-worst” American hot spots, with over 2,700 people in the community falling ill, and over 80 deaths.⁵

These communities also suffer from a lack of testing capabilities. The CDC has recognized that data collection and surveillance efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19 are inadequate. Although much of the state and federal data on COVID-19 and deaths are preliminary, race and ethnicity information are not even available for tens of thousands of cases. Alarming, many states do not even explicitly categorize American Indians and Alaska Natives in their demographic results, instead categorizing them under the label “other.”⁶ An April data analysis by CDC found that the agency was missing 78 percent of the necessary state and local data in communities of color.⁷

Studies have found that communities of color will be the most deeply impacted by the economic damage caused by the pandemic.⁸ These communities already face economic hardships⁹ and a further slowdown of the economy will only worsen those effects. Yet, instead of focusing on how to address these challenges, this Committee has chosen to hold a partisan hearing that is focused on criticizing the Administration and scoring election-year points.

² Samantha Artiga, et. al., *Growing Data Underscore that Communities of Color are Being Harder Hit by COVID-19*, Kaiser Family Foundation, available at <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-policy-watch/growing-data-underscore-communities-color-harder-hit-covid-19/> (last updated Apr. 21, 2020).

³ APM Research Lab, *The Color of Coronavirus: COVID-19 deaths by race and ethnicity in the U.S.*, available at <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race> (last updated May 8, 2020).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Robert Klemko, *Coronavirus has been devastating to the Navajo Nation, and help for a complex fight has been slow*, THE WASHINGTON POST (May 11, 2020), available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/coronavirus-navajo-nation-crisis/2020/05/11/b2a35c4e-91fe-11ea-a0bc-4e9ad4866d21_story.html.

⁶ Rebecca Nagle, *Native Americans being left out of US coronavirus data and labelled as 'other'*, THE GUARDIAN (Apr. 24, 2020), available at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/24/us-native-americans-left-out-coronavirus-data>.

⁷ Sherita Hill Golden, *Coronavirus in African Americans and Other People of Color*, Johns Hopkins Medicine, available at <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/covid19-racial-disparities> (last updated Apr. 20, 2020).

⁸ Lauren Aratani and Dominic Rushe, *African Americans bear the brunt of Covid-19's economic impact*, THE GUARDIAN (Apr. 28, 2020), available at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/28/african-americans-unemployment-covid-19-economic-impact>.

⁹ Diana Farrell, et. al., *Racial Gaps in Financial Outcomes*, Big Data Evidence, J.P. Morgan and Chase Co. Institute, (April 2020), available at <https://institute.jpmorganchase.com/institute/research/household-income-spending/report-racial-gaps-in-financial-outcomes>.

We should take this historic time to lead in the bipartisan tradition of the Energy and Commerce Committee by working together to examine these pressing issues and identifying meaningful solutions to ensure that no one is left behind in this pandemic. All communities should receive the same prevention, testing, and treatment services, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or creed. The CDC has been working with stakeholders to improve community outreach about COVID-19 in order to ensure that all individuals are properly informed about prevention as well as testing/treatment availability. This outreach will help to ensure that accurate data is collected, but we can do more to collect better data and improve care for all Americans.

Thank you for considering this request. Addressing these challenges and concerns through a Health Subcommittee hearing will be critical to identifying novel solutions that support communities of color across the United States and help to attain both better health and economic outcomes during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Michael C. Burgess". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Health