

United States Senate

January 13, 2022

Mr. Jeffrey Zients
White House Coordinator of the COVID-19 Response
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Zients:

We write with grave concern regarding the current state of preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as the Omicron variant fuels record numbers of cases that are threatening the stability of not only our health care systems, but other critical infrastructure as well. Rising caseloads are also threatening the economy, at a time when workers and small businesses can least afford it. Given our current public health crisis, we ask that you address the steps you have taken to prepare the country for the increase in cases, why the Administration failed to take more significant steps earlier to increase access to at-home tests, and how you plan to mitigate the impact of the current and future variants moving forward.

Across America, there are lines for city blocks long to get COVID testing, signs in pharmacies saying they are out of rapid tests, hospitals operating under crisis standards of care, health care staff and first responders falling ill, and millions of people who are exhausted from the toll this pandemic has had. While we fully recognize the productive steps this Administration has taken to encourage vaccination, ensure ready access to vaccines, and increase options to treat the virus, far too many measures – such as increasing access to home-based testing – have been reactive, rather than proactive. This Administration either knew or should have known that testing shortages were occurring across the country over the past several months, and with the full expectation that the virus would likely mutate into a new variant steps to increase testing access should have happened before the current wave hit, not several weeks into the surge, with resources still not available until later this month or beyond.

Mr. Jeffrey Zients
January 13, 2022
Page 2

We must improve preparedness, catch up with current testing and mitigation needs expeditiously, and take additional measures to ensure we are not caught off guard again. We stand ready to work hand in hand with you to ensure all of our communities get what they need as soon as possible, and are prepared for what comes next. With this in mind, we ask that you please respond to the following questions expeditiously.

1. What are some steps the Administration took to increase access to at-home rapid antigen tests and address in-person testing surge capacity in late November 2021, when the Omicron variant first emerged and it became clear that it would eventually reach the United States? Knowing what we know now about the variant, are there more significant actions the Administration could have taken or anything it would do differently in the future if facing a similarly virulent form of COVID-19?
2. What is being done now, and in coming weeks, to provide additional federal support for in-person testing sites to shorten wait times and improve testing availability? Please address efforts to increase staffing support and identify any material supply issues, including efforts to ramp up domestic production of needed items. Please also include details on utilization of the National Guard, FEMA personnel, CDC personnel, the Commissioned Corps, and other federal agency support.
3. What else is being done to improve access to accurate at-home COVID tests, both now and in the future, beyond previously-announced efforts? Please address efforts to increase free supplies, stock through pharmacies, insurance reimbursement guidance, and domestic production.
4. With the increase of at-home tests also comes a gap in public health data. Please describe how the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is working with state and local health departments to provide clear guidance for voluntary self-reporting of at-home tests to improve accuracy of public health data for case rates and test positivity numbers.

Mr. Jeffrey Zients
January 13, 2022
Page 3

5. What else do you need from Congress to ensure improved response and preparedness to address the current spike in cases, increase access to testing, support our health care workforce, and prepare for a swifter and more effective response in the future?

We appreciate your attention to this critical matter and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator