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March 18, 2020

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

I write to urge you to fortify the domestic response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic by directing the Army Corps of Engineers (Army Corps) to convert or construct new temporary medical facilities.

There are already almost 6,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the United States, with that number expected to rise exponentially in the coming days.¹ Public health experts fear that hospitals will be overwhelmed by an influx of confirmed or presumed positive cases.² A *Boston Globe* editorial notes that the virus could cause up to 400,000 hospitalizations in Massachusetts, but that the Massachusetts Hospital Association calculates “there are [...] 14,596 staffed beds in Massachusetts’ acute care hospitals and only about 1,112 in various ICU units.”³ This falls dramatically short of the number of beds that may be needed if the virus continues spreading at its current rate.

Your recently announced national emergency declaration under *the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act* (Stafford Act) empowers the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to assist state and local governments during the COVID-19 outbreak.⁴ The Army Corps “assists the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA by coordinating and organizing public works and engineering-related support as the agent for the

¹ Johns Hopkins University & Medicine, “Coronavirus COVID-19 Global Cases,” Accessed March 17, 2020, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>.

² NPR, “Coronavirus: Over 1,000 Cases Now In U.S., And 'It's Going To Get Worse,' Fauci Says,” Bill Chappell, March 11, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/03/11/814460233/coronavirus-1-000-cases-now-in-u-s-and-it-s-going-to-get-worse-fauci-says>.

³ Boston Globe, “Hospitals on front lines as pandemic takes hold,” Editorial Board, March 14, 2020, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/03/14/opinion/hospitals-must-now-plan-pandemics-worst/>.

⁴ White House, Letter from President Donald J. Trump on Emergency Determination Under the Stafford Act, March 13, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/letter-president-donald-j-trump-emergency-determination-stafford-act/>.

Department of Defense.”⁵ Consistent with this emergency support mission, the Army Corps’ assistance can include assessments of facilities for emergency access by COVID-19 patients and restoring and bolstering critical public facilities, such as hospitals. I urge you to direct the Secretary of Defense to activate the Army Corps in executing this mission nationwide.

Converting usable military and civilian infrastructure into temporary medical centers to receive COVID-19 patients is consistent with the Army Corps’ mission and is necessary to address imminent public health needs. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo recently observed:

States cannot build more hospitals, acquire ventilators or modify facilities quickly enough. At this point, our best hope is to utilize the Army Corps of Engineers to leverage its expertise, equipment and people power to retrofit and equip existing facilities — like military bases or college dormitories — to serve as temporary medical centers. Then we can designate existing hospital beds for the acutely ill.⁶

While I welcome your recent decision to grant Governor Cuomo’s request for New York,⁷ other states need additional capacity for coronavirus-related hospitalizations. Accordingly, your emergency declaration under the *Stafford Act* would support the activation of the Army Corps of Engineers to strengthen the federal response to the coronavirus, and you should activate them immediately nationwide.

Additionally, as many as ten percent of COVID-19 patients may require ventilators, and the sudden spike in need for this equipment could force hospitals into making tragic decisions about how to triage patients.⁸ States and health care providers are also anticipating shortages of other essential drugs and medical supplies, including personal protective equipment (PPE), due to the anticipated surge in hospital utilization and disruptions in supply chains.⁹ That is why I welcome Secretary Esper’s recent announcement that DoD “will provide 5 million respirator masks and 2,000 specialized ventilators”¹⁰ to support the federal response to the coronavirus public health emergency.

Given the reality of the exponential growth of the virus, supplemental infrastructure must be designated and ready to receive patients immediately. The Army Corps is in position to help

⁵ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, “Emergency Response,” <https://www.usace.army.mil/Media/Fact-Sheets/Fact-Sheet-Article-View/Article/475476/emergency-response/>.

⁶ New York Times, “Andrew Cuomo to President Trump: Mobilize the Military to Help Fight Coronavirus,” Andrew M. Cuomo, March 15, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/15/opinion/andrew-cuomo-coronavirus-trump.html?referringSource=articleShare>.

⁷ Politico, “Cuomo says FEMA, Army Corps to help expand hospital surge capacity,” Shannon Young, March 17, 2020, <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/states/new-york/albany/story/2020/03/17/cuomo-says-fema-army-corps-to-help-expand-hospital-surge-capacity-1267413>.

⁸ Washington Post, “Spiking U.S. coronavirus cases could force rationing decisions similar to those made in Italy, China,” Ariana Eunjung Cha, March 15, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/03/15/coronavirus-rationing-us/>.

⁹ CNN, “Health care braces for shortage of supplies due to coronavirus,” Michael Nedelman and Gina Yu, February 29, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/29/health/fda-medical-device-mask-hospital-shortage/index.html>

¹⁰ Associated Press, “Esper: Pentagon to give respirator masks, ventilators to HHS,” Robert Burns, March 17, 2020, <https://news.yahoo.com/esper-pentagon-respirators-ventilators-hhs-192922865.html>.

address this public health emergency by converting existing space into temporary medical centers. Taking this action will save lives.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Warren", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator