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April 30, 2020

The Honorable Admiral Brett Giroir
Assistant Secretary for Health
US Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independent Ave SW
Washington DC 20201

Dear Admiral Giroir-

I write to you today regarding the urgent need for COVID-19 testing in the City of Niagara Falls, New York (the City), and urge the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to make the City a priority location for the establishment of retail self-swab testing locations.

We are several months into this crisis and yet our ability to perform enough COVID-19 tests to identify the sick and stop the spread of this virus is woefully inadequate. In Niagara County, the City of Niagara Falls accounts for one-quarter of all COVID-19 cases in the county, but there is currently not a single continuous testing site up and running in the City.

I was encouraged to hear last week's announcement that HHS has awarded \$73.2 million to retailers like Rite Aid and Walgreens to establish walk-up, self-swab testing locations across the country.¹ Residents in the City of Niagara Falls are desperately in need of this kind of testing access. Roughly a third of all City residents are nonwhite, and a significant number of City residents live below the poverty line.² Poor communities and communities of color tend to have higher rates of pre-existing conditions that make them more vulnerable to COVID-19, and many residents of the City of Niagara Falls rely on public transportation, rendering drive-through testing sites, as well as other testing sites operating outside the City, unusable. These populations need walk-up testing sites right in their communities and they need them today.

It is clear that community spread is already a very real danger in urban areas – including smaller cities like Niagara Falls. We also know that people of color are being infected with and dying from COVID-19 at far higher rates than whites; in New York State, African-Americans make up only 9 percent of the population, but account for 18 percent of all COVID-19 deaths.³ If we do not make a concerted effort to rapidly expand the universe of who is able to access testing, these

¹ "COVID-19 Self-Swab and Point-of-Care Testing Public-Private Partnership." Online at https://beta.sam.gov/opp/e2c1382fcab04090a4e2f592a7b35032/view?index=opp&page=1&organization_id=100011943.100004222.

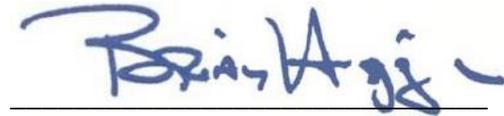
² United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts Niagara Falls city, New York." Online at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/niagarafallscitynewyork>.

³ New York State Department of Health. Online at <https://covid19tracker.health.ny.gov/views/NYS-COVID19-Tracker/NYSDOHCOVID-19Tracker-Fatalities?%3Aembed=yes&%3Atoolbar=no&%3Atabs=n>.

high-risk, underserved communities are going to continue to disproportionately pay the price. I am committed to seeing COVID-19 testing made regularly available and accessible to everyone who needs it, and therefore strongly urge HHS to work with their partners to establish retail testing locations in the City as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian Higgins". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress