Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 04, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Majority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Leader McConnell, and Leader Schumer:

As you continue negotiations to pass a desperately needed legislative package to combat the COVID-19 health crisis and provide continued economic support for Americans, we ask that you include provisions to help stem the spread of this terrible disease. Specifically, we request that Congress provide for the mass distribution of free facial coverings to all Americans, as well as funding for a public service announcement campaign and research into mask efficacy and optimal design. Masks are one of the most effective and least disruptive interventions that we have against COVID-19, and the upcoming legislative package is a perfect opportunity to send a clear message to the American people that masks work.

The evidence is clear: a high level of mask adoption reduces transmission of COVID-19 and is perhaps the single most effective step we can take to reduce the spread of the virus and prevent the need for stricter measures. [1] Numerous studies have found clear and convincing evidence that masks reduce the transmission of the virus substantially, which is vitally important when many infectious carriers are asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic. New studies also suggest that masks may reduce the severity of disease for those that become infected by decreasing viral load.[2] In addition to the health benefits, one recent economic analysis estimated that universal masking could save five percent of GDP, or one trillion dollars, by making lockdowns unnecessary and getting people back to work earlier.[3]

Most Americans are receiving the message, and nearly three-quarters of adults support statewide mask mandates, but there is still more work needed to achieve greater mask adherence.[4] Regrettably, more than five months into the pandemic, there has still been no concerted effort on the federal level to inform Americans about why masks are so important, how they work, and encourage them to wear them as part of our collective fight against this virus.

Compounding this problem, millions of Americans struggling to make ends meet in today's uncertain economy cannot afford to purchase or even locate masks without taking away scarce available dollars

---

1 https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/06/13/spate-new-research-supports-wearing-masks-control-coronavirus-spread/
2 https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-07-14/evidence-mounts-that-masks-help-lower-your-exposure-to-the-coronavirus?fbclid=IwAR1zQkPEy0mIrhAejJqWLixlgnh7_Sqjn07tzKaNUJEyvauspl7wa94JoBM
3 https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/06/30/mask-mandate-gdp-economy-goldman-sachs/
4 https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/22/voters-support-mask-mandates-376132

from basic costs of living such as housing, food and utilities. Some of the most vulnerable Americans who work in health care, as first responders, or other frontline occupations are those with the greatest need for masks. Our goal should be to provide masks to those populations who can least afford them and are most at risk.

We request that such a provision include three key elements. First, we should provide free face coverings to every American. The simple step of creating a mechanism to provide masks to the American people would send a powerful message about their efficacy and importance in our fight against COVID-19. We should make it as easy as possible for Americans to protect their health and the health of those around them by distributing masks by mail via the United States Postal Service and making them accessible for safe, readily available pick-up at convenient locations in their communities.

Second, Congress should appropriate funding for the CDC to begin a public service announcement campaign to promote mask-wearing and inform Americans on the efficacy of cloth masks and why they are recommended by scientific and medical experts to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

And finally, Congress should support further research by the National Institutes of Health on masking, particularly focused on testing the efficacy of various types of facial coverings.

While nothing short of a vaccine or a cure can truly end the threat of this virus, we must aggressively pursue simple and affordable courses of action that can mitigate infections and save tens of thousands of lives.[5] Relative to the billions of dollars that we spent on critical steps like testing and contact tracing and the trillions that we spent on economic relief, masks are a low-cost intervention.

As states across the country experience a worrying climb in COVID-19 infection rates, it's time to take masks seriously as one of the most effective interventions we have against the virus. We respectfully request the inclusion of these mask-related provisions in the upcoming coronavirus relief package and stand ready to work with you. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Adam B. Schiff
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Ro Khanna
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Ami Bera, M.D.
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Lori Trahan
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Bonnie Watson Coleman
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Mary Gay Scanlon
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

---

5 https://covid19.healthdata.org/united-states-of-america

Debbie Dingell
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Peter Welch
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

James P. McGovern
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Darren Soto
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Eleanor Holmes Norton
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Jerry McNerney
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Jamie Raskin
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Mark Takano
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Deb Haaland
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Andre Carson
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Mark Pocan
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Steve Cohen
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Barbara Lee
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Anthony G. Brown
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Joyce Beatty
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Raúl M. Grijalva
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Alan Lowenthal
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Seth Moulton
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Pramila Jayapal
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

David Cicilline
MEMBER OF CONGRESS