

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0533

March 17, 2020

Vice President Mike Pence
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20050

Dear Vice President Pence:

Thank you for serving as chair of the White House Coronavirus Task Force. I am writing regarding a national shortage in the chemical reagents required to conduct coronavirus (COVID-19) testing. Given the importance of these reagents to our national COVID-19 response, I request that the Administration urgently outline its plan to address the shortage. Please also let Congress know if we can help.

As you know, testing patients is critical to containing the pandemic. While the nation continues to struggle with obtaining enough physical testing kits, we now also face a shortage in the chemical reagents needed to process patient samples. Without these reagents, which are required to extract the genetic material, COVID-19 testing kits will be functionally useless.

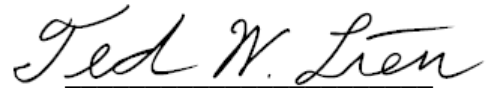
According to numerous public reports, there is a documented shortage of these reagents. CDC Director Robert Redfield told *POLITICO* last week that he was “not confident that U.S. labs have an adequate stock” of the reagents. Meanwhile, the American Society of Microbiology released a statement saying, “We are deeply concerned that as the number of tests increases dramatically over the coming weeks, clinical labs will be unable to deploy them without these critical components.”

The effect of the shortage is already being felt in the U.S. In my home state of California, Gov. Gavin Newsom, has sounded the alarm, indicating that many labs are operating without the chemical ingredients needed to process samples. Los Angeles County Public Health Department Director Barbara Ferrer stated last week that the County, which depends on the CDC to obtain the reagents, has been forced to recommend that lab testing be restricted to individuals with severe disease. She again reiterated this Monday that LA County will have to severely curtail its testing if the reagent shortage is not solved.

If the reagent shortage is not addressed quickly, we will continue to undercount infected patients and our efforts to contain the pandemic will be hindered. Simply put, “flattening the curve” requires not only the actual tests, but also the reagents to process those tests.

Thank you for your attention to this critically important issue. I look forward to your response and stand by to assist in any way that I can.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ted W. Lieu". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress