

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3203

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Peter T. Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20472

Lieutenant General Todd T. Semonite
Chief of Engineers & Commanding General
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20314-1000

Dear Administrator Gaynor and Lieutenant General Semonite,

We are grateful for the steps the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Army Corps of Engineers (Army Corps) have taken to-date to respond to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) national emergency. We appreciate that action is being taken through the National Mission Assignment for the Army Corps of Engineers to make building planners available to states, tribal governments and territories, which is a necessary and important first step. As the current public health and economic crisis continues to grow in New York and across the country, we are writing to urge you to ensure that FEMA and the Army Corps are moving as quickly as possible to rapidly increase the number of available hospital beds for the anticipated surge of patients who will be in need of hospitalization in states that are the hardest hit, including New York.

To date, more than 4,000 New Yorkers have tested positive for COVID-19, by far more than any other state in the nation.^{1,2} That number is expected to greatly increase over the coming days and weeks and has the potential to completely overwhelm our hospital system in an unprecedented way. This week, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo estimated that the state could need as many as 110,000 hospital beds in 45 days.³ That is more than double the number of beds New York currently has. Therefore, it is critically important that all resources of the federal government are fully mobilized to meet this enormous challenge for New York and beyond; it is vital that your agencies are moving as quickly as possible to not only plan, but implement an effective and timely response.

Specifically, we ask that FEMA and the Army Corps work to quickly finalize completion of a standard hospital room design and scope for modifying or retrofitting facilities for use as hospitals or alternate care facilities in New York.

Secondly, we also urge you to ensure that there is no delay in executing the necessary additional Army Corps Mission Assignments. This includes the assessment of

¹ New York State Department of Health. COVID-19 Case Reporting as of March 19, 2020. See: <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/county-county-breakdown-positive-cases>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. COVID-19 Case Reporting as for March 19, 2020. See: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html>

³ Amid Ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic, Governor Cuomo Announces Deployment of 1,000-Bed Hospital Ship 'USNS Comfort' to New York Harbor. March 18, 2020 Press Release. See: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/video-audio-photos-rush-transcript-amid-ongoing-covid-19-pandemic-governor-cuomo-announces>

suitable locations for temporary hospital rooms, and for securing access to the properties and carrying out the physical modifications and retrofits at those locations along with all necessary funding to complete each step of the process. Finally, it includes executing a mission assignment to begin and complete construction of all necessary temporary hospital rooms so that patients in need of quarantined space can utilize the hospital rooms as quickly as possible.

The next several days will be critical for rapidly scaling up our capabilities to get ahead of the curve and do as much as possible to ensure that we have the resources and facilities in place to provide medical care to New Yorkers who are in need of hospitalization during this challenging time.

Thank you for your commitment to addressing this urgent crisis, and we look forward to continuing to partner with you and your agencies to ensure that New York has the help we so urgently need.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator