

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3012
March 10, 2020

Robert R. Redfield, M.D.
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Dr. Redfield:

As New Jersey announced its first death from COVID-19 this afternoon, I write today to follow up on our exchange earlier today in the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Subcommittee hearing. I join my constituents and residents across New Jersey in expressing frustration with the delayed confirmation of New Jersey's 11 presumptive positive cases of COVID-19, from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). As you committed to following up with me, I am writing to request the CDC prioritize confirmation of initial samples so that New Jersey can continue to confidently implement its public health mitigation strategy.

I understand that New Jersey had anticipated confirmation of its presumptive positive cases by Saturday March 7, 2020; however, the CDC failed to meet this deadline, which it had set. I am reiterating my request that you work to resolve this matter expeditiously. As of the transmission of this letter, the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH), in conjunction with the New Jersey Public Health and Environmental Laboratories (PHEL), are still waiting for confirmations for the specimens from 11 patients in the state with presumptive positive cases of COVID-19.

This morning, when I asked you about these pending confirmations, you conceded that "we're moving in [a] direction" where the public should no longer expect CDC to verify test results from state labs. As this will be a departure from current policy, can you clarify at what point you expect this shift to take place? As this would raise questions about CDC's longstanding role in maintaining quality controls, can you share any plans CDC has to continue to ensure testing accuracy?

Further, what is your plan to communicate this change in policy to states and their labs? I understand New Jersey Assistant Health Commissioner Chris Neuwirth reported that the CDC could not provide an explanation for the delay in confirmations — as it appears this policy change may be the cause, it's critical that our state has a clear understanding of what to expect from CDC, and when to expect it.

Finally, and most importantly, should the State of New Jersey still expect to receive confirmation of the 11 pending cases currently with the CDC?

We look forward to your prompt reply to this very urgent matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bonnie Watson Coleman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B".

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress