

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 1, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20006

Dear President Biden:

We applaud your commitment to establish a comprehensive, science-based national strategy to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and save lives. Even as more Americans begin their course of vaccination, it is clear that the virus will not be defeated in the near future, and further efforts to curb it will be critical to save lives and allow Americans to resume normal activities safely.

We have known for nearly a year that masks are one of the most effective and least disruptive interventions that we have against COVID-19¹. We are encouraged by your declaration of a “100 Day Masking Challenge”, asking Americans to do their patriotic duty and wear facial coverings to help stymie the spread of the virus over the first 100 days of your presidency, and requiring their use on federal property. We ask that you consider additional steps beyond encouraging or even mandating mask wearing, and prioritize educating Americans about higher quality masks and explore options to make them readily and freely available.

Wearing a cloth face mask is still the official recommendation of the CDC, but there has been little education or outreach about what kind of masks are most effective. While many Americans understand that wearing a mask can help prevent transmission of the disease, many don’t realize that a high-quality mask can make it far less likely that the wearer will contract the disease, even if exposed to an infectious person.

The White House has recognized this fact by requiring staff to wear N95 masks on the premises.² Other nations, including Germany and France, have provided their citizens higher quality masks, or reimbursed them for the purchase.³

Nearly a year into the pandemic, we must do more to both educate Americans and to increase supply and availability of more effective masks. While we grappled with shortages of PPE in hospitals and made a concerted effort to conserve supplies early in the pandemic, medical grade masks including surgical masks, KN95 masks, and other options are now more widely available. Your Administration can and should take additional steps to increase their supply and availability to Americans.

We ask that you consider taking the following steps immediately:

- 1) Direct the CDC and the FDA to provide the public with clear, actionable, and specific information on how to discern which masks are most effective and where they can get them, as well as how to better utilize existing options.

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/22/health/face-mask-n95-coronavirus-transmission/index.html>

² <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/testing-wristbands-masks-sign-boss-white-house-75415188>

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/europe-coronavirus-masks-regulations/2021/01/20/23463c08-5a74-11eb-a849-6f9423a75ffd_story.html

- 2) Distribute the highest quality medical-grade masks available via the United States Postal Service and make them accessible for safe pick-up at convenient locations in local communities.
- 3) Consider invoking the Defense Production Act to increase the supply of higher quality masks, including N95 or other medical grade masks.

As more Americans are vaccinated each day, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. But with over 150,000 Americans still being infected each day, thousands are dying, and there is rising concern about variants of the virus that may be significantly more infectious.

We must do more to reduce the spread of this virus. We have no time to waste. Thank you for your continued leadership on this critical issue.

Sincerely,



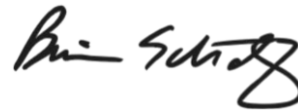
Adam B. Schiff
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Bernie Sanders
U.S. SENATOR



Ro Khanna
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Brian Schatz
U.S. SENATOR

CC:

Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
Jeffrey Zients, coordinator of the Biden Administration's COVID-19 Task Force