

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 27, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence  
Vice President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Vice President Pence:

We write today to request the Coronavirus Task Force issue best practices or guidance to essential businesses, particularly those that are consumer-facing, on appropriate social distancing standards required to keep customers and employees safe throughout the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency. These best practices must ensure continued compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. A strong position from the Coronavirus Task Force would help protect millions of Americans who continue to support essential businesses in this time of crisis.

Essential businesses, such as retailers providing food and medication, serve as the cornerstone of many communities and must be a model of how to reduce the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). This includes complying with social distancing standards issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and ensuring that seniors and people with disabilities – those at greatest risk of illness due to COVID-19 – are not put in harm's way. These unprecedented times have required drastic changes to the way Americans navigate their lives and these companies must be the leader in their communities in meeting the unique challenges of this crisis.

The emerging evidence suggests that the CDC social distancing standards are beginning to flatten the curve of the number of new COVID-19 cases reported across the country. These standards have resulted in changes in the way many organizations operate. For example, grocery stores and other essential businesses have started to limit the number of patrons allowed in a store at any given time. While this is a positive step, this change in policy is resulting in long lines forming outside of businesses. Enforcing the suggested six feet of separation while individuals are waiting in line is critical. This can be done in multiple ways, including by simply designating the appropriate distances with brightly colored tape on the ground and the use of directional arrows inside stores in order to reduce traffic among shoppers. Implementation guidance from the Coronavirus Task Force will help these critical businesses keep their customers and employees safe.

In addition, we urge you to provide to consumer-facing businesses about how to provide accommodations for those with the greatest needs. As lines grow outside of business

establishments, many older adults and people with disabilities are physically unable to stand for the length of time required to enter the stores. This leaves them with the unthinkable decision to leave the line and attempt to return to the store at a different time when the line may be shorter, which would increase their potential exposure to COVID-19. As a solution, older adults and people with disabilities could be provided priority access to the store and chairs or benches should be placed at set intervals outside of the store, providing a place for older adults and people with disabilities to rest while waiting for the line to move forward. These chairs or benches should be placed at least six feet apart and a protocol should be established to regularly clean and disinfect these shared surfaces. Additional accommodations could include systems that allow for contactless pick-up, waiving delivery charges or allowing older adults and people with disabilities the option to schedule an appointment to enter the store. Consumer-facing businesses must continue to ensure that those at the greatest risk of illness from COVID-19 remain supported throughout the public health emergency.

We implore you to take action now to reduce the likelihood of further infection of members of our communities. During these unprecedented times, unprecedented measures must be taken. The Coronavirus Task Force must consider the needs of seniors and people with disabilities while protecting the health and safety of customers and the frontline employees.

Sincerely,

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Robert P. Casey Jr.  
United States Senator

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Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

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Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

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Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

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Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

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Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

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Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

CC:  
Dr. Deborah L. Birx  
Coronavirus Response Coordinator  
White House Coronavirus Task Force