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February 27, 2020

Christi A. Grimm
Principal Deputy Inspector General
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Inspector General
330 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Principal Deputy Inspector General Grimm,

We write to request that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Inspector General assist the Committee on Ways and Means (Committee) in investigating HHS's actions concerning the deployment of HHS non-healthcare personnel to repatriate American citizens potentially exposed to COVID-19 outside of the United States.


We recently became aware that personnel in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) were ordered to enter quarantined areas earlier this month to assist in the repatriation of American citizens evacuated from Wuhan. These ACF employees reportedly were not provided proper training, protocols, or personal protective equipment and were in direct contact with individuals in the quarantined areas. It is also alleged that, post-deployment, these employees have not been tested for COVID-19, quarantined, or monitored for symptoms. In fact, HHS has continued to deploy them to repatriation sites around the country, heightening concerns about transmission of the virus. Additionally, there are alarming reports that leadership disregarded valid concerns expressed by ACF staff and retaliated against staff that raised those concerns.

The Committee wants to be assured that HHS is taking every step possible to protect its employees, and the American public, from exposure to COVID-19. We also want to ensure that HHS is seriously addressing employees' concerns about their health and safety and is not endeavoring to intimidate, impede, or retaliate against employees who raise concerns. Therefore, we respectfully ask that you conduct an investigation into all aspects of the deployment of ACF personnel to quarantined areas, including, but not limited to, an examination of the following issues:

1. Who made the decision to deploy ACF personnel to quarantined areas? Please provide their names and titles.
2. Prior to deployment, were ACF personnel given proper training, instructed on appropriate safety protocols and precautions, and provided adequate personal protective equipment?
3. Post-deployment, did HHS require ACF personnel to adhere to any safety protocols to limit the risk of transmitting COVID-19 to others?
4. Have ACF employees deployed to quarantined areas been tested for COVID-19 and are they being monitored for symptoms of infection?
5. Have other ACF staff (who, for example, may have come into close contact with those employees) been monitored, quarantined, or tested for COVID-19?
6. Does HHS plan to deploy ACF staff to quarantined areas in the future?
7. Were any ACF employees intimidated, impeded, or retaliated against for raising concerns about this program?

We respectfully request that you report to the Committee on the status and findings of this investigation within one week. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


The Honorable Richard E. Neal
Chairman


The Honorable Jimmy Gomez