March 3, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Vice President Pence:

The City and County of San Francisco is writing in regard to the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and to express grave concerns regarding the lack of funding, guidance, and support for local jurisdictions from the federal government. COVID-19 is spreading rapidly across the globe and the number of infected individuals within the United States will continue to rise. The sixth U.S. death was reported yesterday, and community transmission is occurring. Estimates include that 30% of Americans could become infected, with mortality rates as high as 2%. Millions of lives are at risk.

While the epidemic is increasing in severity, there is inadequate coordination among your office, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), resulting in an insufficient response from the federal government. Since January, the City and County of San Francisco has been coordinating preparedness activities for additional cases and transmission in our community. On February 25, 2020, San Francisco County declared a local state of emergency to prepare for the inevitable spread of COVID-19. However, the White House’s anemic response and lack of transparency prevents us from optimizing this preparation. We need reliable and timely data on the epidemic, faster action from the CDC, support to execute federal directives to test, quarantine and monitor individuals at high risk, and immediate guidance on how to best protect healthcare providers, facilities, and the public in the face of community transmission of the virus.

This deficient response highlights the disastrous decision on the part of the Administration in 2018 to eliminate the Pandemic Response Team, despite scientific consensus that the risk of global spread of pathogens remained high. Similarly, we are now seeing the consequences of ongoing efforts to cut healthcare funding, including in public health. Meaningful action is markedly slow or absent, within the White House, HHS, and the CDC.

Leadership at the federal level is imperative — we cannot wait as the window to take action to reduce community infections is closing. We request urgent action on the following issues:

- The federal administration has requested $2.6 billion to address this epidemic. This is not commensurate with the risk to our communities and is significantly lower than previous federal spending on infectious disease response (ex. $7.65 billion for H1N1 in 2009). Any federal funding should also include resources that directly support local governments to accelerate response.

- Personal protective equipment is critical in keeping our first responders and medical personnel safe. Counties have inadequate supplies of N-95 respirators, gowns, goggles, and face masks for those working in medical settings. The federal government must secure supplies to ensure healthcare worker and patient safety.
• We need to immediately expand testing capacity, both locally and nationally. The lack of test kits is a national disgrace. We will not be able to contain, treat, or mitigate the effects of the virus if we cannot diagnose infection. For instance, while San Francisco is scheduled to finally start testing locally this week, we have been provided with only 250 kits.

• Federal guidance and proactive communication are imperative to assist counties with:
  - Managing medical settings and staffing to minimize the risk of transmission.
  - Scaling up medical responses in local communities.
  - Addressing specific populations who are most at risk of mortality from COVID-19. This includes individuals who are above the age of 55, people with chronic diseases, and persons who are experiencing homelessness.
  - Providing updated recommendations as new information emerges about the epidemic, including increased knowledge of transmission dynamics and risk factors.

• News and media reporting from around the world include stories of hostility and discrimination toward Asian Americans, as well as Chinese residents and students. This is unacceptable and harmful. We know racial, ethnic and cultural discrimination cause bad health outcomes. In the case of an emerging illness, stigma about the illness makes people less likely to come forward, seek help, or ask questions. That makes it harder to fight the disease and preserve community health. The federal government has not provided adequate communication to support communities who are stigmatized and discriminated against because of inaccurate assumptions about disease transmission. Similarly, the federal government has not provided adequate response to conspiracy theories about the cause of the epidemic.

• San Francisco has already begun to feel the economic impacts of COVID-19. Local businesses, restaurants, and the travel and tourism sectors have felt substantive losses over the last few weeks. The federal government should be looking at all available assistance programs to support state and local jurisdiction responses to COVID-19. Although San Francisco typically coordinates federal declaration requests through the State of California, the geographic spread of COVID-19 across the nation demands unique federal action. A U.S. Small Business Administration declaration and a Presidential Disaster Declaration would increase capacity for state and local governments to aid their constituents by triggering both physical and financial assistance.

We request support for an approach to the emerging pandemic that is based on science, transparency, and resource allocations to protect the American public.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

London N. Breed
Mayor

cc: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives
    The Honorable Jackie Speier, U.S. House of Representatives
    The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, U.S. Senate
    The Honorable Kamala Harris, U.S. Senate