

JOSH HAWLEY
MISSOURI

KYLE PLOTKIN
CHIEF OF STAFF

212 RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
TELEPHONE: (202) 224-6154
FAX: (202) 228-0526
WWW.HAWLEY.SENATE.GOV

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2509

COMMITTEES
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March 19, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Peter T. Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Secretary Azar and Administrator Gaynor,

As the twenty-fifth person in Missouri tests positive for COVID-19 (coronavirus) and the state begins implementing state-wide precautionary measures, I write to you both concerning preparations for staffing shortages and disruptions in the state's healthcare and hospital systems.

The Golden Valley Memorial Hospital in Clinton, Missouri, is no longer accepting new patients after treating one with coronavirus.¹ Springfield, Missouri, has a limited number of hospital beds and draws patients from a broad geographic area, raising concerns that space and care might be further restricted amid responses to coronavirus.

These circumstances must be seen in light of the already troubling trends for the state's healthcare system. A report published by the Missouri Hospital Association noted that 32 rural counties in the state do not have licensed hospitals, requiring their residents to travel large distances.² In 2014, 9% of the state's licensed physicians practiced in rural areas, reflecting a 15% drop since 2011, and six rural hospitals have closed over the last five

¹ <https://www.kmbc.com/article/breaking-one-of-missouris-new-presumptive-coronavirus-cases-is-in-henry-county/31517770>

² "Primary Care Physicians: Missouri Workforce Update," Special Report, *Missouri Hospital Association*, August 2018, p. 5, https://www.mhanet.com/mhaimages/Special%20Reports/Primary%20Care%20Physician%20Status_0818.pdf

years (with three of those between 2018 and 2019).³

In light of these difficult circumstances, I would like to know what kinds of options HHS and FEMA are considering to address potential workforce shortages and stresses on Missouri's healthcare system. In particular, please let me know of any plans HHS and FEMA might have to deploy medical response teams, such as Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (DMATs) and/or the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, or other contingency measures to help augment the healthcare needs of Missouri's communities.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Hawley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Josh Hawley
United States Senator

Accessed 15 March 2020.

³ Kacen J. Bayless, Seth Bodine, "For rural Missourians, access to quality health care is a nightmare," *Columbia Missourian*, 10 June 2019, https://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/state_news/for-rural-missourians-access-to-quality-health-care-is-a/article_b0b1abe8-8bc9-11e9-a6f9-83546412207d.html

Accessed 16 March 2020.