

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
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October 7, 2020

The Honorable Mark Meadows  
Chief of Staff  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Meadows:

I write with alarm regarding recent reports that, despite more than 30 people testing positive for the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) in the outbreak surrounding President Trump, the White House is not conducting a robust contact tracing investigation and has cut the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) out of its process.<sup>1</sup> As I have previously stated, robust contact tracing is critical to containing the virus and reopening America's communities and economy.<sup>2</sup> I urge the White House to work with CDC and local public health officials to ensure existing CDC protocols are followed and that robust contact tracing efforts take place to protect the health of White House staff and the surrounding communities.

While the Administration has said that contact tracing for the White House outbreak is underway, these efforts do not appear to adhere to CDC guidance. For instance, CDC recommends that anyone who comes within six feet of someone confirmed to have COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes should get tested and self-quarantine for 14 days.<sup>3</sup> Yet close contacts of those who tested positive continued to return to the White House, and it reportedly took three days after President Trump tweeted his COVID-19 diagnosis for the White House to notify staff

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<sup>1</sup> *White House Is Not Tracing Contacts for 'Super-Spreader' Rose Garden Event*, New York Times (Oct. 5, 2020); *The 30 people who have tested positive in the Trump Covid outbreak*, Politico (Oct. 2, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Frank Pallone, Jr., Chairman, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Alex M. Azar (Apr. 30, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Public Health Guidance for Community-Related Exposure* ([www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/public-health-recommendations.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/public-health-recommendations.html)) (accessed Oct. 6, 2020).

not to come to work if they have symptoms.<sup>4</sup> Other potential close contacts, including members of the press and guests of White House or campaign events, have reportedly not been contacted at all.<sup>5</sup> And even though the Republican National Committee sent the New Jersey Department of Health a list of 206 names and email addresses of attendees at a October 1 Bedminster, New Jersey, fundraising event attended by the President, health officials note they have not been provided enough information to conduct robust contact tracing.<sup>6</sup>

Further, the White House has reportedly decided not to contact trace back to the 150-person U.S. Supreme Court nomination event at the White House on September 26, despite numerous attendees subsequently testing positive for COVID-19.<sup>7</sup> Experts have questioned this decision, noting the timeline of President Trump's symptoms and the number of people at the September 26 event who have since tested positive—many of whom were not wearing face coverings and were standing in close proximity to others at indoor and outdoor portions of the event.<sup>8</sup> The White House's refusal to release the date of the President's most recent negative test, or confirm when the President first tested positive, further contributes to skepticism regarding the White House's contact tracing timeline.<sup>9</sup>

Disturbingly, although CDC reportedly had a contact tracing team standing by since Friday, October 2, the White House has reportedly not reached out to CDC, instead enlisting the White House Medical Unit.<sup>10</sup> While a White House spokesperson indicated the White House Medical Unit was working with a CDC epidemiologist detailed to the White House, they declined to name the scientist, and two senior CDC staff said they were “unaware of such a role within the White House.”<sup>11</sup> Public health experts are concerned by the White House's failure to involve CDC in the White House outbreak contact tracing efforts, with one such expert stating it is a “total abdication of responsibility by the Trump administration” that poses a “massive public health threat.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Concern rises for White House residence staffers as their workplace emerges as a virus hot spot*, Washington Post (Oct. 5, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> *White House Says It Initiated Contact Tracing, But Many Say They Haven't Been Contacted*, Forbes (Oct. 5, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> *White House Is Not Tracing Contacts for 'Super-Spreader' Rose Garden Event*, New York Times (Oct. 5, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *We Still Don't Know When President Trump Last Tested Negative for COVID-19. Here's Why That's a Big Deal*, Time (Oct. 6, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> *See* note 6.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

The Honorable Mark Meadows

October 7, 2020

Page 3

Finally, in addition to White House political staff and guests, there are now reports of at least two White House residence staff contracting COVID-19 in recent weeks.<sup>13</sup> According to Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser, however, there has been a lack of communication from the White House.<sup>14</sup> In fact, according to a D.C. official, the White House has not informed the D.C. Department of Health of any positive test results, a step necessary to begin contact tracing efforts within the community.<sup>15</sup>

This simply cannot continue. If the White House wants to contain its COVID-19 outbreak and truly protect all of the people working in the White House, it must enlist CDC's expertise to manage the contact tracing efforts moving forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frank Pallone, Jr." in a cursive script.

Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Chairman

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<sup>13</sup> See note 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*; *D.C. gov't says it's been unable to connect with White House for Covid contact tracing*, NBC News (Oct. 6, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> *D.C. gov't says it's been unable to connect with White House for Covid contact tracing*, NBC News (Oct. 6, 2020).