

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 15, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra,

As our country continues to face unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I am reaching out regarding the increasing difficulty that Granite Staters face in COVID-19 testing availability and the test result turnaround time. The Biden administration's October 6th announcement of a \$1 billion dollar investment to increase the availability of rapid at-home COVID-19 tests marks a significant step toward addressing this issue. I write to encourage the administration to build upon this investment to make sure that the tests are available where they are needed most.

The number of COVID-19 tests performed daily has grown from an average of 450,000 tests in early July to 1.5 million at the end of August. The need for robust testing capacity is particularly urgent given the delta variant. Public health experts have made clear that widespread access to free PCR tests with rapid turnaround times is essential to reducing COVID-19 spread, particularly in schools with children who are not yet eligible for the vaccine.

I welcome the steps that the White House is taking to expand production of tests, including its commitment to procure an additional 180 million rapid tests over the next year. Tens of millions of tests are expected to come to the market over the course of the next month, addressing this urgent need.

As these tests come to the market, our nation needs a targeted plan to ensure that supplies go to where they are needed most. I have heard directly from multiple Granite Staters that they are unable to access timely COVID-19 testing. This is a particularly urgent concern given the role of COVID-19 testing in the back-to-school plans for many school districts.

Many families are concerned that the lack of testing availability and slow turnaround time for test results will keep their children out of school or daycare for extended periods. I heard from a New Hampshire family whose daughter had symptoms similar to that of COVID-19 – and they did not get test results back for nearly two weeks, so she had to stay home that entire time. Another parent shared with me that they visited six different pharmacies in search of an at-home COVID-19 antigen test. Sadly, these individuals' stories are far too common. A recent article in the *Union Leader* also highlights this plight as well, discussing how chronic shortages and an

overwhelmed system have led to children missing school as they wait for COVID-19 test results, a serious concern given the learning loss many children experienced last year.

As the federal government continues to work on this issue, a plan to ensure that supplies reach consumers in areas with high need would ensure that the most urgent shortages are addressed effectively.

To guarantee that we are meeting the needs of Granite Staters, I ask you to respond by November 12, 2021 with information on:

1. How the administration plans to collect data on shortage areas; and
2. How the administration will use this data to inform manufacturing and distribution to ensure that testing supply meets demand across the country.

Thank you for your steadfast work and attention to this issue.

With every good wish,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Maggie Hassan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator