



One Hundred Sixteenth Congress  
Committee on Homeland Security  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

July 10, 2020

The Honorable Chad Wolf  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

I write today to express my concerns regarding the rise in the number of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employees testing positive for COVID-19. According to data regularly provided to this Committee, the number of employees who currently have the virus is the highest it has been since reporting began in March. The number of employees who are in quarantine or self-isolating has similarly continued to rise, with a 27 percent increase in the last two weeks alone. As these numbers continue to increase, the Committee is concerned about the Department's ability to protect its workforce.

Many Department employees are on the front lines and have continued to protect American communities throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Components like the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) are required to interact regularly with the public, and those two components make up 70 percent of all DHS employees who have tested positive for COVID-19. Over 2,000 TSA and CBP employees have tested positive for COVID-19 as of July 10, 2020, and sadly eleven have lost their lives.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately these numbers are only going up, and in the last two weeks CBP saw a 52 percent increase in positive COVID-19 cases while TSA saw a 43 percent increase.

Despite this troubling trend, it appears your Department has not taken simple steps to help ensure these employees are as safe as possible. Earlier this week I wrote a letter to TSA Administrator David Pekoske repeating a request that he issue a requirement for all airline passengers to wear masks to go through TSA security checkpoints.<sup>2</sup> As the number of airline passengers continues to increase, so do the risks to the Transportation Security Officers who are required to interact with every single passenger.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CBP COVID-19 Updates and Announcements, U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/coronavirus> (accessed July 10, 2020); Coronavirus (COVID-19) information, TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION, <https://www.tsa.gov/coronavirus> (accessed July 10, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, and J. Luis Correa, Chairman, Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security, to David Pekoske, Administrator, Transportation Security Administration, July 6, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Leslie Josephs, *Air travel jumps over July 4 weekend, but down more than 70% from 2019*, CNBC, July 6, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/06/air-travel-jumps-july-4-weekend-but-still-down-sharply-from-2019-amid-covid-19pandemic.html>.

U.S. Secret Service agents have also been put at risk by the President and Vice President's attendance at political rallies and other public events. Two of the Secret Service agents who ensured President Trump's safety at his Tulsa, Oklahoma rally on June 20 tested positive for the virus, while dozens of others were required to quarantine.<sup>4</sup> Former Secret Service agents reportedly told *The Washington Post*, "The move by the Secret Service to try to limit the spread of the infection shows how Trump's decision to go forward with the rally increased the health risks and burden on the people who protect the president."<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the White House has made no commitment to halt public events. Just last week Vice President Pence delayed but did not cancel a trip to Phoenix after another Secret Service agent tested positive and numerous others started showing symptoms.<sup>6</sup> The President and Vice President's actions have hit the Secret Service hard, with a 1000 percent increase in its employees testing positive for COVID-19 in the last month alone, according to data provided to the Committee.

In addition to the requirements of their typical duties, law enforcement officers from Secret Service, CBP, TSA, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, are now being expected to participate in the Protecting American Communities Task Force (PACT) you created last week.<sup>7</sup> The Committee has several questions about how these components will be supporting the Federal Protective Service in its role to secure monuments, memorials, statutes, and federal facilities, as outlined in the letter I sent you on July 6.<sup>8</sup> The Committee is troubled that these new duties will unnecessarily increase the risk these law enforcement officers face.

As the number of DHS employees who have fallen ill during this pandemic continues to rise at an alarming rate, I urge you to take the steps necessary to protect all of the DHS workforce. I thank you for your urgent attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON  
Chairman

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<sup>4</sup> Carol D. Leonnig and Joshua Partlow, *Dozens of Secret Service officers and agents told to self-quarantine after Trump's Tulsa rally*, THE WASHINGTON POST, June 24, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/dozens-of-secret-service-officers-and-agents-told-to-self-quarantine-after-trumps-tulsa-rally/2020/06/24/22c08b36-b55f-11ea-aca5-ebb63d27e1ff\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/dozens-of-secret-service-officers-and-agents-told-to-self-quarantine-after-trumps-tulsa-rally/2020/06/24/22c08b36-b55f-11ea-aca5-ebb63d27e1ff_story.html).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Carol D. Leonnig and Joshua Partlow, *Secret Service agents preparing for Pence Arizona trip contracted coronavirus*, THE WASHINGTON POST, July 2, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/secret-service-agents-preparing-for-pence-arizona-trip-contracted-coronavirus/2020/07/02/8029280c-bc97-11ea-bdaf-a129f921026f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/secret-service-agents-preparing-for-pence-arizona-trip-contracted-coronavirus/2020/07/02/8029280c-bc97-11ea-bdaf-a129f921026f_story.html).

<sup>7</sup> *Press Release: DHS Announces New Task Force to Protect American Monuments, Memorials, and Statues*, DEPT. OF HOMELAND SECURITY, July 1, 2020, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2020/07/01/dhs-announces-new-task-force-protect-american-monuments-memorials-and-statues>.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, to Chad Wolf, Acting Secretary, Department of Homeland Security, July 6, 2020.