

# Congress of the United States

## Washington, DC 20515

April 21, 2020

The Honorable John Bel Edwards  
Governor of Louisiana  
P.O. Box 94004  
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Dear Governor Edwards:

Recent reports of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) cases in Louisiana indicate that 71 percent of the confirmed tests in our state are African Americans. As you know, this demographic only represents 32 percent of Louisiana's population. Clearly, we all must better understand this disproportionate number of cases affecting our African American citizens.

The State of Louisiana has a vital role to play in this epidemic, as your announcement of a task force specifically focused on the issue of disparities shows. It is a great step to address what is clearly a crisis. Getting answers from experts is the first step, and we are glad that the task force includes representation from the top-flight researchers at Louisiana's colleges and universities.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), included \$1,800,000,000 for the State of Louisiana to address COVID-19 response activities, an estimated \$500,000,000 for the state in funds related to our education systems, and billions of additional dollars through Social Services Block Grants, Community Development Block Grants, hospital and healthcare funding, first responder grants, law enforcement grants, and other programs. We know the state and our local governments need much more and we continue fighting in Congress to get all the funding Louisiana needs to respond and recover from this crisis.

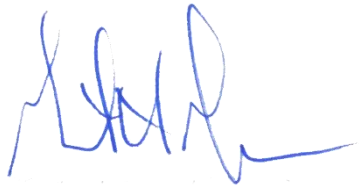
Getting answers from the experts is the first step. Putting real resources towards research moving forward is the next. It is our hope that you will pair the task force with a real commitment to investments in important medical research affecting Louisiana's vulnerable populations.

Data compiled by the Louisiana Department of Health indicates that several comorbidities exist with a COVID-19 diagnosis. Some of the most prominent include hypertension (66.4%), diabetes (43.5%), chronic kidney disease (25.1%), and obesity (24.7%). The Pennington Biomedical Research Center is one

of the nation's top research facilities of its kind. The center's work on diabetes, hypertension and obesity is some of the foremost in the United States. Other universities in the epicenter of the crisis including Xavier, LSU Health Sciences Center New Orleans, and Tulane have unmatched expertise in related fields as well and the LSU-AG Center's extension activities can help deliver results to all of the state's parishes.

To better understand the relationship between underlying conditions, increased vulnerability to COVID-19, improved access to healthcare services and other potential risk factors, we urge you to pair the task force with a substantial investment into top-flight research in Louisiana. This commitment will assist our ongoing efforts to secure additional resources from the National Institutes of Health and other federal and private institutions to help us better prepare for the future, prevent COVID-19 transmission, and address health disparities in Louisiana and around the world.

Sincerely,



Garret Graves  
Member of Congress



Cedric Richmond  
Member of Congress