

April 29, 2020



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

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

Thank you for your leadership and efforts to address the coronavirus crisis, which poses a grave and growing threat to millions of older adults and the people who care for them.

LeadingAge represents more than 5,000 not-for-profit providers of aging services, including nursing homes, assisted living, providers of HUD-assisted senior housing, life plan communities, community-based services providers, home health and hospice – the entire continuum of care for older adults. Our membership includes more than 2,000 not-for-profit nursing homes.

I am writing to request a meeting with you and your staff to discuss how not-for-profit aging services providers can engage with DHS in its COVID-19 response, particularly as the agency ventures towards distributing critical personal protective equipment (PPE) to nursing homes across the country. Our members are deeply concerned when they see media reports that DHS, FEMA and other federal agencies have consulted only with associations representing for-profit provider organizations—leaving millions of people whose health is cared for by thousands of not-for-profit providers unrepresented in critical conversations addressing the distribution of PPE. We also want to ensure that millions of older adults whose care comes out side of nursing homes are not left out.

I do not believe DHS or FEMA is intentionally overlooking not-for-profit aging services providers and the more than two million older adults LeadingAge members serve across the country. However, that is exactly how it appears to these hardworking, mission-driven providers, who are facing some of the deadliest outbreaks of coronavirus across the country. At least 10,000 people have died of COVID-19 at nursing homes alone, and more are dying every day.

In addition, we wish to emphasize with DHS and FEMA the need for PPE distribution to include the full continuum of aging services, including hospices, home health agencies, HCBS providers and affordable housing communities.

It's also important to understand that efforts to reopen our communities will require protection, testing, and medical supplies for older Americans regardless of where they live. Otherwise, our communities will be ground zero for a new wave of preventable deaths and illnesses—which will further tax our beleaguered hospitals and health care providers.

We appreciate all you and the dedicated staff at DHS and FEMA are doing to get PPE into the hands of nursing homes. We would like to meet with you in the very near future to discuss the critical role our members are playing on the front lines of battling COVID-19, and how we can help DHS and FEMA coordinate with not-for-profit aging services providers.

Please contact me or have your staff contact Ruth Katz, SVP for Policy, at rkatz@leadingage.org or 202-508-9470 with any follow up or questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Smith Sloan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "K".

Katie Smith Sloan
President and CEO
LeadingAge