



## Katie Smith Sloan May 14 Telepresser Remarks

THURSDAY, MAY 14, 10:30 AM by ZOOM

Good morning. Thank you all for being here. My name is Katie Smith Sloan, and I am the president of LeadingAge, which represents 5,000 nonprofit member organizations that provide care for older adults in every corner of the country.

We're here today because the President is visiting a PPE distributor in Allentown, Pennsylvania. But a few miles down the road from the rope lines and the photographers, aging services providers like Westminster Village at Allentown have been desperately scrounging for months for the PPE and tests they need to protect their residents from the virus.

Two weeks ago, I attended a White House event hoping for bold actions to get immediate help to care providers on the front line of the COVID crisis. Instead, only symbolic measures were announced.

We need tangible *leadership*—not photos, or banners, or words, or symbols. We need new, concrete actions that will get masks to the care workers who serve millions of older adults—masks like those distributed by the facility in Allentown.

From the outset of the pandemic, it has been clear that older adults and caregivers are at the greatest risk. But our leaders in Washington, DC did not listen, did not plan, and did not prioritize the health and lives of older adults.

The result is no surprise: a slow-motion catastrophe, playing out in communities in Pennsylvania and across the country.

8 in 10 people who have died of COVID-19 were people over 65. Millions of older adults continue to live in fear as infections and death tolls climb. Brave care workers show up for work each day despite the risks and lack of supplies they need to stay safe.

For too long, our nation's leaders have failed older Americans. Since long before COVID-19, nursing homes and other older adult services providers have struggled to get the resources they need to keep up with an older population that is growing faster and living longer. And since the first day the crisis struck, care providers have been crying out for help. But week after week *after week*, those calls went unanswered.

Now, more than half of LeadingAge members say they expect their current supply of PPE to last at most two weeks. Some tell me they are burning through a year's worth of their PPE budget in just a month. And, when they have a COVID diagnosis, more than 90% are concerned about their PPE supplies.

Around the country, the people who care for older adults are fighting for every mask and gown they can muster. Some have resorted to wearing trash bags for protection. Others have had to rely on someone they call “Parking Lot Guy” to supply desperately needed PPE.

We learned that FEMA plans to deliver two weeks worth of PPE to nursing homes by the end of June. But two weeks is too little, and the end of June is too late. And none of it helps the millions of older adults in assisted living, affordable housing and other care settings.

As communities begin reopening, we can’t be forced to compete on the open market with nail salons and gyms for life-protecting supplies. The situation is no better with testing. On Monday, the President declared that we have prevailed, but the reality is that, even in the places where it’s most needed—like nursing homes all across the country—adequate testing is still unavailable.

The Vice President had a call with Governors urging states to test every nursing home resident and care worker in the next two weeks. We have yet to hear how that testing will be implemented. With this virus, someone may be fine one day and not the next. So testing must be continuous and results must come in minutes not days. How else can we isolate infected people and keep uninfected care workers on the job?

As the virus rages on, we cannot continue down this path or an entire generation will be threatened—especially as communities are starting to reopen, without clear protections for older adults. No more wishful thinking. No more empty promises. We know what needs to be done -- and we need action now. Lives are at stake. We need ample PPE and ongoing rapid testing. We need to support the front line care workers who put themselves at risk to help others. And, we need Congress to allocate more funding to the aging services sector that has been pounded by this vicious virus.

It’s time for real action and real leadership—today and in the months to come. Let me state this very clearly: ***Older lives are not expendable.***