

October 15, 2020

Mr. Lee dePalo
Regional Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency Region VIII
Denver Federal Center Bld. 710
PO Box 25267
Denver, CO 80225-0267

Mr. dePalo:

I write today to bring to your attention the recent surge in COVID-19 cases in Montana and request the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to conduct an assessment of Montana's needs and consider additional federal assistance to provide Montana relief during this time of crisis.

Montana is currently experiencing a regional surge of COVID-19 cases. Nationally, we have the third highest rate of new cases and the second highest rate of test positivity. Last week, an average of 84% of hospitals in Montana reported either new confirmed or new suspected COVID-19 patients each day. As hospitals across the state respond to this increasing demand, ensuring availability of beds, ICU beds, ventilators, other medical equipment, as well as staff to manage patients is critical. I understand thousands of federal health care professionals have been deployed during the pandemic to work with local health care providers that are overwhelmed in hotspot areas across the nation. With this in mind, I urge FEMA to consider how this kind of assistance could help Montana combat this surge in cases and provide additional support, especially as we near flu season and our state may be further strained in its ability to care for patients.

As a frontier state, Montana already faces unique health care challenges as many patients in our rural communities have to travel far distances for acute care services. Our critical access hospitals provide a lifeline to Montanans in our rural communities, but staffing is a critical concern, and we need more health care providers that can care for patients. Additionally, Indian Country has been hit hard by the virus in Montana, with cases increasing rapidly in Big Horn, Rosebud, and Glacier counties. According to data released by the Montana Department of Health and Human Services, Native Americans accounted for 15% of Montana's total COVID-19 cases. Increased access to testing, portable hand washing stations, and additional quarantine facilities capable of withstanding winter conditions would go a long way towards combatting this virus in our tribal communities.

As Montana is experiencing a record number of positive COVID-19 cases and our hospitals across the state are reaching capacity, I respectfully request FEMA to conduct a needs assessment and consider providing additional federal relief that will protect the health of Montanans, including those in our rural and tribal communities, and support our local and state officials who are on the front lines of this public health crisis.

Thank you for your attention to this request. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator