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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025
<http://appropriations.senate.gov>

April 8, 2020

The Honorable William Barr
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Barr,

I write in regards to the Department of Justice's (DOJ) activities to target individuals and companies hoarding critical medical equipment, engaging in price gouging and using the COVID-19 pandemic to scam or defraud others. I applaud the recent efforts of the DOJ's COVID-19 Hoarding and Price Gouging Task Force to identify the hoarding of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and redistribute the equipment to those on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ These efforts are critical as we seek to ensure that PPE is distributed to areas struggling most with the pandemic. I understand that additional investigations are underway as the Department continues to enforce restrictions on the medical equipment market and encourage you to prioritize these important efforts moving forward. I also appreciate the March 16, 2020, guidance given to all U.S. Attorney's Offices to prioritize prosecutions of criminal activity related to COVID-19 as well as the March 19, 2020, direction to appoint a Coronavirus Fraud Coordinator in each District.

As the Department continues to address criminal activity related to COVID-19, I urge you to ensure that support is also provided to smaller United States Attorney's Offices (USAO) and Federal Bureau of Investigation Resident Agencies. This effort must engage all levels of the Department and encourage coordination across jurisdictions. Therefore, I request that the Department establish a New England COVID-19 Task Force that brings together federal and state agencies, prosecutors and law enforcement to address scams, price gouging and other deceptive practices associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Many other USAOs across the country have announced similar collaborative efforts to combine resources and go after bad actors attempting to capitalize on confusion and desperation during this crisis. States in the New England region have been hit particularly hard by COVID-19, and we must ensure that PPE ends up in the right hands and those committing illegal and fraudulent activity are stopped. This Task Force will go a long way in identifying criminal activity, redistributing PPE and preventing criminals from preying on more innocent victims.

No one should profit off the great hardships experienced by millions of Americans during this pandemic. Ensuring that price gougers and scammers are brought to justice and medical

¹ Press Release, Department of Justice, Department of Justice and Department of Health and Human Services Partner to Distribute More Than Half a Million Medical Supplies Confiscated from Price Gougers (April 2, 2020) (on file with author).

equipment is appropriately distributed should be the Department's foremost priority in facilitating the government's efforts to deliver PPE and help keep the public safe.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeanne Shaheen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jeanne" and last name "Shaheen" clearly distinguishable.

Jeanne Shaheen

Vice Chair

Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies