

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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October 5, 2020

Dr. Robert R. Redfield
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Director Redfield:

We write to request that you use your authority under section 361 of the Public Health Services Act to issue a nationwide moratorium on drinking water shutoffs, because access to clean water is essential to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.¹

With over 7 million coronavirus cases in the United States and over 200,000 lives lost, the coronavirus remains a major public health threat in this country.² Numerous public health officials, including yourself and other officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), have stated that access to clean water is essential to stopping the spread of the coronavirus. For example, in March CDC recommended washing hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.³ In addition, during a hearing before the Committee on Oversight and Reform on coronavirus preparedness and response, you testified about the importance of people washing their hands in order to stop the spread of the disease.⁴ Public health officials continue to recommend hand washing to prevent and slow the spread of the coronavirus.⁵ In fact, you reiterated last month that hand washing, along with mask-wearing and social distancing, could bring the virus “under control.”⁶

¹ 42 U.S.C. § 264.

² John Hopkins University & Medicine, *Coronavirus Resource Center* (online at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>) (accessed on Oct. 5, 2020).

³ *Coronavirus: Over 1,000 Cases Now In U.S., And 'It's Going To Get Worse,' Fauci Says*, National Public Radio (Mar. 11, 2020) (online at www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/03/11/814460233/coronavirus-1-000-cases-now-in-u-s-and-it-s-going-to-get-worse-fauci-says).

⁴ Committee on Oversight and Reform, *Hearing on Coronavirus Preparedness and Response* (Mar. 11 – 12, 2020) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/legislation/hearings/coronavirus-preparedness-and-response>).

⁵ *Fauci: The US, Still in First COVID-19 Wave, Should Prepare For the 'Challenge' of Fall and Winter, The Hill* (Sept. 25, 2020) (online at <https://thehill.com/changing-america/well-being/prevention-cures/518173-fauci-the-us-still-in-first-covid-19-wave-should>).

⁶ *CDC Director Says South Turning the Tide as College Parties Fuel Coronavirus Concerns*, Washington Post (Aug. 20, 2020) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/08/20/coronavirus-covid-live-updates-us/).

Dr. Robert Redfield

Page 2

At this crucial time, there is no national moratorium on water shutoffs to ensure that every American has access to clean water. Although several states acted at the beginning of the pandemic to implement moratoriums on water shutoffs, many of these state moratoriums have expired or will expire in the coming weeks. For example, moratoriums have recently expired in Illinois, North Carolina, and Maryland. As a result of these and other expirations of water shutoff moratoriums, over half of the United States' population is currently at risk for water disconnection.⁷

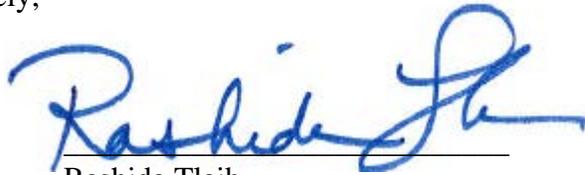
Just as CDC acted to ensure that Americans are protected from evictions, access to water in each person's home is also essential to preventing the spread of the coronavirus and allow people infected with the virus to isolate without the need to come in contact with other persons in order to bathe or drink water.⁸ For the above reasons, the Subcommittee urges you to order a nationwide moratorium on water shutoffs under section 361 of the Public Health Services Act.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-5051. Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,



Harley Rouda
Chairman
Subcommittee on Environment



Rashida Tlaib
Vice Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Environment

cc: The Honorable Mark Green, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Environment

⁷ UPDATE: 57 Million People Have Lost Protections from Water Shutoffs as Pandemic Still Rages, Food & Water Watch (Sept. 1, 2020) (online at <http://foodandwaterwatch.org/news/update-57-million-people-have-lost-protections-water-shutoffs-pandemic-still-rages>).

⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services, *Temporary Halt in Residential Evictions to Prevent the Further Spread of COVID-19* (Sept. 4, 2020) (online at www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/09/04/2020-19654/temporary-halt-in-residential-evictions-to-prevent-the-further-spread-of-covid-19).