STATE OF NEW YORK

January 18, 2021

Alex M. Azar II
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

One year ago this month, the Trump Administration banned travel from China, a policy that ignored the obvious reality that the novel coronavirus had already spread to Europe where millions of travelers boarded flights to the New York metropolitan region, leaving northeast states ambushed by the deadly virus. In the year since, the Trump Administration's incompetent response to the pandemic resulted in nearly 24 million positive cases and nearly 400,000 deaths in the U.S.

The President and his White House Coronavirus Task Force repeatedly and negligently failed to protect the U.S. from this public health crisis, leaving states to fend for themselves when it came to purchasing critical equipment and failing to promulgate rational public health backed guidance on mask wearing. The mismanagement continues to this day with the botched rollout of the vaccine: the federal government failed to provide states with any semblance of a cogent plan nor funding necessary to execute a mass vaccination effort.

Despite every opportunity to reflect on and fix past errors, last week you created even more damage, anxiety and confusion among the American public when you told reporters on January 12, 2021 that the federal government would increase the supply of vaccines by shipping "all of the doses that had been held in physical reserve" when in reality, according to news reports, the federal government had already distributed all of those doses and supply would not be increasing. In fact, New York would soon find out that we would receive 50,000 fewer doses from the federal government than the week prior.

Even worse, that same week many states – including New York – expanded eligibility requirements in line with your recommendations, increasing the number of eligible New Yorkers from 5 million to 7 million people.

The American people deserve an explanation.

New York is not alone in this demand. Oregon Governor Kate Brown called it “deception on a national scale.” Washington Governor Jay Inslee said that the Trump Administration “must answer immediately for this deception.” Colorado Governor Jared Polis said he was “shocked” that the American public was “lied to” by the federal government. And Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer said the “American people have been misled.”

There must be a full accounting of this mismanagement. When were these additional doses released? Were you aware at the time you made these public comments that there were not additional doses in reserve? When will vaccine supply increase? Will the second doses we have been promised actually arrive? Why was New York’s Week Six allocations cut at a time when we were promised an increased supply?

I, and the 19.45 million New Yorkers I represent, demand a response to these questions and await your answers.

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo