



Duckworth Calls on FEMA to Justify Diversion of 5 Million Masks VA Ordered to Protect Veterans and VA Personnel

May 19 2020 4:41 PM

– Today, U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) called on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide a transparent and detailed justification of why a shipment of personal protective equipment (PPE)—specifically, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) order of five million masks—was diverted away from the VA and delivered to FEMA. The head of VA’s Veterans Health Administration (VHA) described this incident while explaining why certain VA medical facilities, hospitals and clinics were running low on PPE: “I had 5 million masks incoming that disappeared.”

In part, Duckworth wrote: “The deadly coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has already killed more than 80,000 Americans. The Federal Government should prioritize providing PPE to the dedicated civil servants who serve with VA, and the hardworking employees of VA contractors, to protect the health of the VA workforce and the health of our Nation’s Veterans that receive high quality, affordable healthcare services through VHA. It is simply unacceptable that PPE supply shortages forced certain VA medical centers, hospitals and clinics to operate at what Dr. Stone described as “austerity levels.””

Duckworth previously [requested](#) that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigate FEMA’s Supply Chain Stabilization Task Force, including Project Air Bridge, to ensure compliance with federal law in distributing critical medical supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Public reporting has shown possible evidence of mismanagement and secrecy around Project Air Bridge and raised concerns regarding the Task Force’s ability to appropriately distribute the life-saving equipment to state and local governments.

A full copy of the letter is available below and online [here](#).