

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20515

January 6, 2022

The Honorable Michael L. Parson  
Governor  
State of Missouri  
P.O. Box 720  
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Dear Governor Parson,

I write today in response to the ongoing public health crisis that is wreaking havoc in our communities in St. Louis. Just this week, Missouri has reported over 38,000 new COVID-19 cases,<sup>1</sup> adding to the staggering 1 million positive tests recorded in Missouri since March 2020.<sup>2</sup> It is clear that we have entered a new and highly transmissible phase of the pandemic, which requires urgent action to mitigate further harm to our communities.

As the public health emergency evolves, so too must our approach in order to prevent the loss of life and health of Missourians. Residents need public officials at every level of government—federal, state, and local—to work together to direct our full power to ending this pandemic. **I strongly urge you to formally request a federal COVID-19 testing site for St. Louis, as well as the deployment of federal medical personnel—military doctors, nurses, and EMTs—to assist our overburdened hospital systems and help enhance testing and staffing capacity across the St. Louis region.**

Over the past few weeks, Omicron has led to record infection rates and hospitalizations in St. Louis. In fact, the St. Louis region is now reporting over a 30 percent COVID-19 positivity rate.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, earlier this week area hospitals surpassed more than 1,000 current hospitalizations for the first time since the pandemic began. Our local hospitals are being stretched to the brink with 87% of hospital beds and 83% of ICU beds currently occupied,<sup>4</sup> and the rising infection rates among health care workers has resulted in staffing shortages that, if left unaddressed, will prevent our hospitals from being able to adequately meet patient needs.

Moreover, we are seeing an increasing number of pediatric hospitalizations that will further extend our hospital capacity, especially while we wait for vaccine authorization for children under 5 years old. In this moment of crisis, we cannot afford to scale back our efforts to respond to this pandemic — we must do everything we can to meet the needs of our communities, particularly those that have been hardest hit by this public health emergency.

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<sup>1</sup><https://fox2now.com/news/missouri/gov-parson-says-its-not-the-states-job-to-provide-mass-covid-testing-sites/>

<sup>2</sup><https://missouriindependent.com/2021/12/30/gov-parson-declares-end-to-covid-emergency-as-cases-soar-to-record-levels/>

<sup>3</sup><https://stlouiscountymo.gov/st-louis-county-departments/public-health/covid-19/covid-19-data-reports/>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.ksdk.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/coronavirus-numbers/st-louis-hospitals-report-record-number-covid-patients/63-dd50b816-3cf9-4aa5-bf4e-9da0362b583b>

Fortunately, the Biden-Harris Administration has committed to providing states with essential resources to address this emergency, including deploying additional medical personnel, expanding hospital capacity, and standing up federal testing sites and pop-up vaccination clinics. Missouri must take advantage of these resources and deliver increased support for St. Louis and all communities in need.

Specifically, the Increasing Community Access to Testing (ICATT), a new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) program developed for rapid COVID-19 surge response, can be requested to help enhance our capacity to meet the increased needs for rapid testing. The ICATT program is but one of many tools at your disposal to implement a comprehensive approach to curbing the current Omicron surge. Applying for this program will cost Missouri nothing, but doing nothing will undoubtedly cost people their lives.

The federal government is prepared to immediately deploy support at the request of Governors, and over the last two weeks have stood up free COVID-19 testing sites in several states, including Texas, New Jersey, Maine, Delaware, and Nevada, among others.<sup>5</sup> Missouri must not waste any more time in securing these lifesaving resources.

Since the Omicron surge, I have met with health experts, hospital leaders, and providers, including the St. Louis Metropolitan Pandemic Task Force, to assess the needs of our region, and there is a desperate need for expanded testing to ease the burden on our hospitals, health centers, local clinics, and dedicated health care workforce. Despite over 150,000 at-home test kits currently sitting in the State Emergency Management Agency warehouse<sup>6</sup>, St. Louisans report experiencing difficulty accessing PCR tests. I implore the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) to oversee the management and distribution of the life-saving testing kits. The use of these measures will help mitigate the spread of COVID-19, and be further enhanced by the federal government's commitment to mailing free, at-home rapid tests to millions of households over the coming weeks.

Lawmakers at every level must implement data-driven policies that match the scope and scale of the public health crisis. As we head into the third year of this pandemic, we have ample data from health officials, recommendations from advocates, and experience from impacted constituents about how to curb the spread of COVID-19. I look forward to working together to bolster the state's rapid response with federal resources to address this crisis, save lives, and protect the health and well-being of our St. Louis community.

Sincerely,



CORI BUSH  
Member of Congress

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/05/politics/covid-19-testing-sites/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* Fox 2 Now.