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Rep. Adams, Chairman Scott Call on Secretary Scalia to Take Immediate Action to Protect Workers Against COVID-19

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Committee leaders ask Labor Department to issue an emergency temporary infectious disease standard to protect the safety of U.S. workers

Washington, D.C. – Committee on Education and Labor Chairman Robert C. “Bobby” Scott (VA-03) and Subcommittee on Workforce Protections Chair Alma Adams (NC-12) called on Department of Labor (DOL) Secretary Eugene Scalia to take immediate action to protect U.S. workers against COVID-19. In a letter to the Department, the Committee leaders asked Secretary Scalia to direct the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard in response to the emerging COVID-19 epidemic.

OSHA currently has no enforceable standard protecting U.S. workers from airborne infectious diseases. As a result, there are no clear requirements for how workplaces must respond to ensure workers’ safety from the spread of COVID-19. The risk is particularly great for health care workers, who are on the frontlines treating the rising number cases across the country.

“As we enter into what is likely to be the greatest infectious disease crisis this country has faced in over a century, it is in the national interest that OSHA be on the forefront of protecting workers essential to the country’s health care system,” **Chairs Adams and Scott wrote**. “If health care workers are quarantined in large numbers, or get ill or die, or fear coming to work due to the risks, it’s not just a personal or workplace problem, it’s a national public health disaster.”

The Occupational Safety and Health Act gives the Department the authority to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard if employees are exposed to grave danger from toxic or physically harmful substances or hazards.

Chairman Scott and Chair Adams previously **submitted a letter** to the Department in late January calling on OSHA to prepare an Emergency Temporary Standard if the COVID-19 virus became a grave danger to health care workers. The Department missed the deadline to respond to Members’ questions about their plan and has made no public statements signaling their intent to issue a standard to protect workers.

Under the Obama administration, OSHA put an infectious disease standard on the active regulatory agenda and was in the process of issuing a permanent standard. The Trump administration took the standard off the active regulatory agenda and slashed OSHA’s regulatory budget, halting progress towards a final standard.

“We reiterate our call for OSHA to put the infectious disease standard back on the active regulatory agenda and to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard to protect health care workers from COVID-19,” **the Members wrote**.

To read the letter to Secretary Scalia, **[click here](#)**.

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