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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

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August 08, 2020

Robert R. Redfield, MD
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Mailstop F-80
4770 Buford Highway, NE
Atlanta, GA, 30341-3717

Dear Dr. Redfield:

As the world continues to battle COVID-19, efforts by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are valuable resources for states and territories. One such resource is the CDC COVID-19 Travel Health Notice (THN), which notifies travelers about health threats around the world and provides COVID-19 travel recommendations by country.

On Friday, August 7, the CDC issued a warning to travelers that "COVID-19 risk in Guam is high." While I respect the CDC's fundamental role in protecting the nation and its People throughout this pandemic, every U.S. territory is included in the High Level Risk list despite the fact that most U.S. territories have done a better job of containing COVID-19 than many states. At the very least, the CDC should understand that Guam is American soil and that approximately 4 million U.S. citizens live in Guam and its sister territories.

Though others can be forgiven for not understanding the complex history of the United States and its unincorporated territories, the CDC should know that we do not have a foreign ministry of health or a foreign designee at the U.S. State Department. Guam's sons and daughters carry this nation's flag into battle and too often lay under that flag in eternal rest—that sacrifice will not be ignored.

The CDC has been an exemplary partner throughout this crisis. That is why I believe its latest advisory must provide greater clarity than a mere headline can communicate. Namely, what fact based metric places every U.S. territory on the same "high level risk" even when some of those territories have zero new cases? Moreover, Guam's test positivity rate is well below 2%—better than the following states which are closer to the national average of 8%: South Dakota, Indiana, Tennessee, and Nebraska. Our COVID-19 hospitalization rate remains stable with an average of 2-3 per day. We are also prepared for any surge in hospitalization with 83 COVID designated hospital beds (with a capacity to increase beds 200 or more) and 75 ventilators.

A recent study cited by National Public Radio (NPR) concluded that Guam was one of the few places in the nation implementing robust contact tracing. While we are currently exceeding Guam's estimated need for contact tracers based on the Contact Tracing Workforce Estimator with 56 contact tracers, we are in the process of enhancing that capacity even more.

Our robust contact and tracing efforts have allowed us to detect potential clusters and test them, resulting in our number of increased cases. Through these efforts I have adopted policies to specifically address the root causes of these clusters in a proactive way. Though no policy can eradicate COVID-19 entirely, we continually monitor our data and revise our mitigation efforts on what that data tells us.

Furthermore, based on data from our contact investigators, most of our confirmed cases are travel-related and were identified in quarantine. This shows that our current mitigation strategies are effective and have prevented further community transmission.

These are facts the CDC criteria does not seem to adequately weigh in their assessment.

Despite the success of the U.S. territories in our response to COVID-19, we have been included in a High Level Risk list rather than used as examples for states to follow. We recommend providing separate risk assessments for the territories to provide a better understanding for the COVID-19 risk of each jurisdiction.

I want to close by acknowledging the great support the CDC has been throughout this crisis, but I know that we are all committed to improving where we can.

Senseramente,



LOURDES A. LEON GUERRERO
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