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MICHELE BROOKS
STATE SENATOR, 50TH DISTRICT



Senate of Pennsylvania

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December 29, 2021

Keara Klinepeter
Acting Secretary
Department of Health
625 Forster Street, 8th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Meg Snead
Acting Secretary
Department of Human Services
625 Forster Street, 3rd Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Acting Secretary,

An article written by Eric Mark in The Times-Tribune yesterday asserts that “ghost flights” carrying refugees into the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport “might have been organized by the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement.” The article can be found online here: https://www.thetimes-tribune.com/ice-denies-it-organized-charter-flights-to-wilkes-barre-scranton-international-airport/article_44e368eb-c068-5d39-bd8f-2ff35060c588.html

I would be hard-pressed to believe that federal HHS involvement in a mission into Pennsylvania would be attained without your awareness. Did the federal government notify your offices of their intent to bring these individuals into Pennsylvania?

We are in the midst of the biggest risk to our health care systems and the health of our Pennsylvanians, as you are all too familiar. What protocols are in place for assessing the health of individuals entering Pennsylvania from beyond our domestic borders? What health checkpoints, COVID-19 testing, and quarantine policies are in place to ensure that these individuals are not accelerating the spread of this pandemic? Are they offered vaccination following their quarantine? Responses to this pandemic have not only threatened our health, but devastated our economy, multiplied those suffering from substance use disorder, and impacted our educational system. That being said, I cannot imagine that we have the additional resources for the influx of new individuals when we are struggling to support our own citizens. I am also requesting exact data on the number of individuals who have come into our country and resettled in Pennsylvania within the past year.

Additionally, with the shortage of tests in Pennsylvania, I am requesting information on access to these tests, if testing is being done upon their arrival. First and foremost, what is the status of their immigration into our country and state? Is the short supply of tests in our commonwealth being used for these purposes? Are they being given coveted at-home tests? Or, if the federal government is paying for them and/or supplying them, then where has that support been to our citizens throughout this intense surge of COVID-19?

As Chair of the Senate's Health and Human Services Committee, I should be kept abreast of such developments, certainly as it pertains to the number and volume of resources being used for these unexpected arrivals when we are working diligently to care for our own citizens in Pennsylvania. I have been discussing access to at-home tests and the need for increasing our supply of tests from the federal government for months. Again, per our discussions, many residents are foregoing testing altogether because they are waiting hours for a test, or even days, exacerbating the whole situation. In addition, I have been talking to you repeatedly about the need to alleviate the pressures on our hospitals, particularly as it relates to bed and staffing shortages. While I appreciate your efforts to utilize the National Guard, you have assured me that Pennsylvania is doing everything it can to secure these resources from our federal partners. We have yet to see these promises come to fruition, and I am disheartened by the potential diversion of these resources to non-citizens.

In the spirit of transparency, this information should be readily available to the people of Pennsylvania without being requested.

I look forward to your timely response to my concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michele Brooks". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michele Brooks
State Senator, 50th District

cc: Dr. Denise Johnson, Physician General