

MAYOR OF LONDON

Dr Onkar Sahota AM

Chair of the London Assembly Health Committee

C/o Aoife.Nolan@london.gov.uk

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Date: 18 November 2020

Dear Onkar,

Thank you for your letter of 29 September raising your concerns about the level of testing and the barriers faced by Londoners in accessing testing. I am sorry for the delay in responding.

Since receiving your letter, we now find ourselves in the situation where the Prime Minister has had no choice but to introduce a second lockdown. This is a result of his continued failure to listen to his own scientific experts who called for a shorter circuit breaker early in the autumn. I am absolutely furious that the Government has dithered and delayed yet again, and their indecision will have unimaginable consequences – both lives and livelihoods will be lost as a result. I am clear that this time must be used to make urgent improvements in the Government's approach. This includes improving the test, trace and isolate system, making communications more accessible, and investing in communities and organisations to support those most at risk.

Despite our rising cases, London's testing rate remains the lowest in the country. This is simply unacceptable, and I continue to lobby the Government to provide London with the capacity and service it needs. The Government must deliver a fully functioning test, trace, isolate and support system, accessible to all Londoners, so our economy can fully reopen safely.

Thank you for raising the important point of identity checks. I am concerned about this as a barrier to testing. Further to this, we have heard from civil society stakeholders that digital exclusion, fear of being reported to the Home Office and language barriers are excluding people from wanting to take a COVID-19 test in the first place.

Before the Government moved London into 'Tier 2' High Alert Level I wrote to the Prime Minister about the support London urgently needs, including in relation to testing. In my letter of 14 October, I raised this issue of identity verification checks for home testing. As you rightly highlight, in addition to the barrier of the check itself, if you cannot get a home test kit you are diverted to a walk-in or drive-through test centre. Therefore, I also raised the issue that these centres are not accessible to many Londoners, especially the many who do not have cars. I called on the Government to ensure that Londoners can access testing within a reasonable distance from their home, and that a system must be put in place which is not reliant on having a visible credit history. A full copy of my letter can be viewed here: <https://twitter.com/MayorofLondon/status/1316622481160011778>.

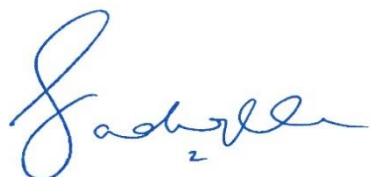
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In addition to the barriers around testing, I have urged the Government to suspend the NHS Charging Regulations and all associated immigration checks and data sharing, which are undermining our efforts in London to stop the spread of COVID-19. These policies help create a hostile environment and are leaving many of our key workers and their families exposed and unable to afford the treatment and care that they need.

I have consistently raised concerns that health inequalities are being compounded by immigration policies that can create destitution and perversely encourage discrimination against BAME and migrant Londoners. The World Health Organization has called on the world to ensure that everyone, including all migrants and refugees, has equal access to health services and is effectively included in national responses to COVID-19. I remain deeply concerned that some policies are risking Londoners' public health.

Thank you again for writing to me.

Yours sincerely,



Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London