

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20510

November 13, 2020

Dr. Robert R. Redfield, M.D.  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Director Redfield:

We write with urgent concern surrounding recent reports of multiple confirmed positive COVID-19 cases on board the first cruise ship to carry passengers in the Caribbean since countries around the world imposed strict limitations on operations in mid-March. In light of these disturbing reports, we feel strongly that you should reverse course on the recent decision by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to take a phased approach to restarting cruise line operations in the United States. Instead, we implore you to extend the prior no-sail order until a time when the health and safety of passengers and crew can be assured.

On Wednesday, SeaDream Yacht Club – a Norwegian-based cruise line company – announced that a passenger on board one of its ships had preliminarily tested positive for COVID-19. Last night, reports confirmed several other cases aboard the ship and that at least five people aboard have tested positive for coronavirus after undergoing additional screening.<sup>1</sup> According to individuals on the vessel, all passengers and staff underwent rigorous testing prior to embarking on the voyage and the company took additional steps to increase safety while sailing, such as social distancing, mask requirements, and strict hygiene protocols.<sup>2</sup> Despite these efforts and good intentions, the virus was still able to infect multiple people on the ship, with the possibility of more confirmed cases emerging as passengers and crew are retested. Unfortunately, this troubling development is not surprising and reaffirms the need to exercise extreme caution before sending passengers and crew back out to sea on cruises.

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Gilbert, “5 people reportedly tested positive for the coronavirus on the first Caribbean cruise since the pandemic began,” *Business Insider*, November 12, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/cruise-passengers-positive-cornavirus-case-on-first-voyage-since-march-2020-11>.

<sup>2</sup> “One of the first Caribbean cruises since pandemic began sees suspected Covid case,” *Guardian*, November 12, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/12/caribbean-cruise-ship-coronavirus-seadream>; Gene Sloan, “The first cruise ship to resume sailing in the Caribbean is heaving a COVID scare,” *The Points Guy*, November 11, 2020, <https://thepointsguy.com/news/caribbean-cruise-covid-scare-seadream/>.

According to the CDC’s own no-sail order, “[c]ruise ships continue to be an unsafe environment with close quarters where the disease spreads easily and is not readily detected.”<sup>3</sup> In fact, cruise ships were breeding grounds for the virus at the epicenter of the initial COVID-19 outbreak. With the images of passengers and crew stranded aboard the *Grand Princess* still fresh in our minds, it is imperative that we learn from the past and take immediate action to prevent history from repeating itself.

As you are well aware, on October 30, 2020, the CDC released a joint order with the Department of Health and Human Services lifting the previously imposed no-sail order for cruise ships operating in the United States.<sup>4</sup> The order set out a seemingly robust and phased approach to restarting cruise line operations, but we have serious concerns that – even with the additional requirements and standards – cruising is simply unsafe during a global pandemic. As COVID-19 cases skyrocket across the country, it is unconscionable for the CDC to move forward on a plan to resume operations given the ongoing risks. While we appreciate the difficult economic situation cruise line operators face and the desire of many cruising enthusiasts to restore a sense of normalcy, the CDC must always put health and safety first to prevent further spread of this deadly virus and save lives.

As such, we urge you to cease efforts to restart cruise line operations and reinstate the no-sail order immediately. We appreciate your attention to this important matter and expect a response no later than November 27, 2020.

Sincerely,

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

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RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate

/s/ Doris Matsui

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DORIS MATSUI  
Member of Congress

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<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “No Sail Order and Suspension of Further Embarkation; Third Modification and Extension of No Sail Order and Other Measures Related to Operations,” 85 FR 62732, <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2020-22030> (accessed November 12, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Framework For Conditional Sailing and Initial Phase COVID-19 Testing Requirements for Protection of Crew,” [https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/pdf/CDC-Conditional-Sail-Order\\_10\\_30\\_2020-p.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/pdf/CDC-Conditional-Sail-Order_10_30_2020-p.pdf) (accessed November 12, 2020).