30th March 2020 

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Department of Health and Social Care

Richmond House

79 Whitehall

London

SW1A 2NS

Dear Secretary of State,

I am emailing you as the GMB London Ambulance Service Trust Union Branch Secretary to raise my concerns to you on behalf of our members.

Our members are doing a excellent job in the front line fight against this very serious crisis that our service faces on a daily basis. Our staff are at breaking point and in fear of their lives and their familes lives. They continue to battle in an ever challenging enviroment without the best protection available to them to undertake their role.

I do understand that these are exceptional times and that we are all in this fight together. However, our members don’t feel that this Government is doing everything possible to protect them at work.

This Government acted far too late in equipping front line staff with the PPE (personal protective equipment) our members needed to keep themselves and their familes safe. This has been proved by the amount of staff the London Ambulance Service Trust have off sick or self isolationg with symptoms of covid-19, which was approx around 1000 staff last week.

We are following the Governments and PHE Ambulance PPE Guidelines, which we as the GMB LAS Branch, do not feel goes far enough in order to protect our members. .

Fit testing for staff was far too late in coming and not all staff were successful in passing, but still attended calls. Whilst the London Ambulance have been proactive, the issue was that the tester ran out of masks quite quickly, so this left staff unprotected with little guidance from the Government or PHE.

Our members were being told on a daily basis that there was enough masks, but the problem in getting them to staff was due to the break down of the supply chain. This again is a failer of this Government due to privatisation in the NHS. This then had to be taken back in house, which in turn left our front line staff short of PPE and again expsosed to the virus without the proper protection. This was not the fault of the London Ambulance Service Trust but this Government.

Supplies are getting through now, but we still have concerns.

To date, we are still having problems with PPE and our members are getting very upset, anxious and frustrated that this issue is still ongoing and they are being put at risk by you and this Government.

The quality of the PPE that is now being provided is to say the at the very least, poor.

The aprons are very flimsy, tear easily and are very cheap. They are not suitable for a pre-hospital setting. If the wind catches them, they break and this in turn has lead to many occasions when the apron flys in the face of our members on the front line, potenitally putting staff unnecessarily at risk of contracting the virus, and potentially spreading it further.

This is totally unacceptable to GMB LAS Union. We would ask you to urgently supply PPE that is robust enough to cope with a pre hospital setting. I would suggest that aprons are not the best protection as I have pointed out. GMB LAS Union is asking for you to recommend all ambulance staff to wear a suit that will not flap about and will give better protection to our members.

I have also had reported that the new masks 3M8833 break around the nose piece, breaking the seal when on a job where they need to be worn for a substancial period of time, like a resucation attempt.

Please can I ask for the Government to supply the origanal FFP3 mask which is varstly supperior and will protect staff better.

PHE has issued Guidance to Ambulance Trust about PPE. I am aware that the GMB have also written to you as this is also a national crisis. GMB LAS Union believes this does not go far enough in London where the epicentre of this crisis is at this moment in time. I am asking you to recommend to the London Ambulance Service Trust that our frontline staff must wear the FFP3 masks and suits ( the full PPE ) to all patients, especially those that are showing signs and symptoms of the covid-19 virus, irreseptive if they are diagnoised or not.

We must protect our frontline staff and do everything we can to the highest level. Our members and colleagues are doing an excellent job in fighting this battle. So, can you please support our posistion and show our members and colleagues that you are taking their health and saftey as a paramount and ask your Government and PHE to recommend our view.

Your sincerley

Clive Tombs

Emergency Medical Technician

GMB London Ambulance Branch Secretary