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California State Senate

SENATOR
SCOTT WILK
SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER
TWENTY-FIRST SENATE DISTRICT



COMMITTEES
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October 21, 2021

The Honorable Mark Ghaly MD, MPH
Secretary
California Health and Human Services Agency
1600 Ninth Street, Room 460
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Valencia Branch Laboratory Contract Auto-renewal

Dear Secretary Ghaly,

I am appreciative of your October 18, 2021 response to my letter regarding alleged deficiencies at the Valencia Branch Lab (VBL). I read your response with interest and thank you for your promptness in responding to my previous letter after months of no clear response to my staff from the administration.

While we may disagree on many of the COVID-19-related decisions this administration has made during the past 18 months, I would hope we do agree on the importance of ensuring both public safety and effective stewardship of public resources. This includes vigorous oversight of the total \$1.7 billion no-bid PerkinElmer COVID-19 testing contract, which I understand is set to auto-renew at month's end.

As you appear unable to provide a definitive date on when the final report on the VBL from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) will be made public, I urge you to halt the auto-renewal of the contract. Instead, to the extent the testing capacity at the VBL is still needed, the contract should only be renewed in finite, short-term increments (e.g., 30 or 60 days at a time) until the final report becomes publicly available. I believe it would be irresponsible to let any contract auto-renew when serious allegations remain unanswered and the report out of public reach.

I would also like to point out the weekly data by the Turnaround Time Dashboard published by CDPH for all COVID-19 testing labs in the state. The dashboard shows that a significant number of tests consistently take more than two days to complete, and hope you might be able to explain why, nine months after, this is still the case. You can see that most private labs are making the 24 hour turnaround time, while VBL is a consistent outlier. In some weeks, such as in the week of 9-26-21 through 10-2-21, more than 34% of tests missed the 48 hour window. The lab's performance is especially concerning considering that the Governor's [press release](#) on the contract, which emphasized that the purpose of this contract was about reducing turnaround time.

Testing laboratories are an integral part of the state's efforts to stem the spread of a pandemic that has taken far too many lives, kept our children out of school for over a year and ruined thousands of businesses. Delaying the auto-renewal until the release of the final report into VBL is clearly in the public interest, and it is my hope you give postponement serious consideration. If you have any questions, please call my office at 916-651-4021 or email me at Senator.Wilk@senate.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Scott Wilk".

Scott Wilk
Senate Republican Leader

CC: Tomás J. Aragón , M.D., Dr. P.H., California Department of Public Health