



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE OF DELAWARE
LEGISLATIVE HALL
DOVER, DELAWARE 19901

April 30, 2020

Governor John Carney
Tatnall Building
150 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Dover, DE 19901

Dear Governor Carney,

On March 12, you used your authority under the Delaware Code (Title 20, Chapter 31) to declare a State of Emergency in reaction to the perceived threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since that time, you have renewed the State of Emergency and issued 13 modifications of the declaration.

We were supportive of the initial actions you took. Given the dire projections and the opinions of health experts at the time, we too believed these actions were prudent and necessary. Even when we have had differing opinions regarding the state's response, our members have worked with your administration behind the scenes to present a united front during one of our state's most difficult periods.

Today is the 49th day Delawareans are living under the restrictions imposed by your State of Emergency declaration. With the lives and livelihoods of our citizens under threat, we can no longer remain silent.

While COVID-19 poses a significant public health concern, the efforts to curtail its spread have created their own problems that are just as alarming.

Each of us has been in contact with hundreds of anxious citizens, small business owners, and non-profit organizations that have all but exhausted their resources. More than 75,000 Delawareans have filed for unemployment benefits since March 15th. Many have yet to receive their first check. Thousands of additional independent contractors and self-employed individuals will not even be able to apply for such benefits until May 11. Vast numbers of Delaware businesses, even those allowed to operate under the State of Emergency, are struggling to stay viable.

Research conducted by the JPMorgan Chase Institute shows that 50 percent of small businesses are operating with fewer than 15 “cash buffer days” – the number of days a business can pay its typical expenses out of its cash balance, while generating no income.

We are seven full weeks into the current economic disruption.

Ironically, the shutdown done to protect our citizens has had a substantial negative impact on public health. The heightened anxiety created by the loss of jobs and incomes will inevitably lead to spikes in stress-related problems, such as heart attacks, substance abuse, suicides, and depression.

Additionally, as detailed in a recent Reuters article, citizens are postponing tests crucial for detecting early signs of disease, monitoring its progression, and improving patient outcomes. According to Komodo, which has one of the nation’s largest medical claims data bases, since mid-March, cervical cancer screenings are down 68%, cholesterol panels fell by 67%, and blood sugar tests to detect diabetes dropped by 65%.

Thousands of Delawareans have lost their health care coverage, or will soon lose it, as businesses and jobs unable to survive the current turmoil disappear.

More government aid is not the answer. Enhanced unemployment benefits, and new government loans and grants, while buying some time, cannot take the place of a functioning economy.

Reengaging Delaware’s economy needs to be a top consideration, yet your re-start plan lacks any sense of urgency or predictability.

It calls for three conditions to be met before the three-phase plan can even begin: “a 14-day decline in the percentage of positive cases; the ability to treat COVID-19 patients in hospitals without crisis care; and extensive testing programs for health care workers.”

The first condition is the most troubling. Your administration has prioritized increased testing, especially in hot spot areas. This will lead to the discovery of more cases. This is a flawed metric on which to base the recovery since a higher case rate is a function of expanded detection, not an increased threat to public health.

After seven weeks of tracking COVID-19 information, we now know it poses the largest danger to several well-defined groups. Of the total deaths linked to the novel coronavirus in Delaware thus far, all but eight had underlying health issues, 61.1% resided in long-term care facilities, and more than 90% were senior citizens.

Like other viruses of the past, it is unlikely we can ever fully eradicate COVID-19. Fortunately, treatments are emerging, and vaccines are under development. However,

even the most optimistic projections indicate significant quantities of an effective vaccine will not be available until at least September.

Even accepting this estimate, it would be more than four months before any Delawareans could receive a COVID-19 inoculation. It would take many additional weeks to vaccinate the entire population and for those receiving the shots to develop full immunity.

Our citizens, small business operators, and non-profit groups cannot afford to remain in forced stasis indefinitely. The clock is quickly running out.

For many, it is already too late. Some business owners will never reopen their doors, with the jobs they provided permanently lost. Our economy is likely to emerge from this shutdown under recessionary conditions and it will take months for momentum to build and for the public to be willing and capable of engaging in commerce anywhere near pre-pandemic levels.

We need to restart our economy now in a way that responsibly manages risk; allows businesses to resume operations under protocols to curtail the spread of the virus; and provides our citizens and businesses with a predictable path forward that allows them to make plans on which they can act.

This need not be a binary decision. We can continue to take action to mitigate the spread of the virus; institute aggressive steps to protect those groups most at risk from severe consequences of infection; and allow citizens and businesses to return to work in a responsible manner.

Delawareans are desperate for action.

Sincerely,

State Representative Danny Short
State Representative Tim Dukes
State Representative Ruth Briggs King
State Representative Rich Collins
State Representative Ron Gray
State Representative Kevin Hensley
State Representative Shannon Morris
State Representative Charles Postles
State Representative Mike Ramone
State Representative Bryan Shupe
State Representative Mike Smith
State Representative Steve Smyk
State Representative Jeff Spiegelman
State Representative Jesse Vanderwende
State Representative Lyndon Yearick