



May 19, 2020

The Honorable Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr.  
Governor of the State of Maryland  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1991

Dear Governor Hogan:

From the beginning of this crisis we, the undersigned, have been on conference calls almost every day to discuss challenges, ways we can work together, and share solutions that have worked in each of our jurisdictions. We know that in the State of Maryland and in this region, residents know no borders. They travel across State and county lines every day, so we have found it essential to make one another aware of the decisions we are making.

As we move into the first full week of Phase 1 of your plan to reopen the State, we write to update you of our successes and share our concerns that call for an active state role and your continued leadership and partnership.

First, consistent with your delegation of emergency powers, each of us has successfully implemented our own local executive orders. Please know that our decisions were based on protecting the health, safety and lives of our respective residents. Since collectively we represent the parts of our State where approximately 80% of the total COVID-19 cases and fatalities have occurred in Maryland, you should be confident that we are doing our part to keep Maryland safe.

The biggest lesson that we have learned since Friday is how unclear the public is about your delegation of authority to local leaders. Please continue to help us create greater clarity by repeating a refrain that the public should check with their local governing body for the rules that apply in their local subdivisions. Making every effort collectively to educate the public in these trying times is critical.

Second, we wish to outline the following concerns we share that relate to the four pillars of your reopening plan: (i) expanding testing capacity, (ii) robust contact tracing operation, (iii) increasing the supply of PPE, and (iv) increasing hospital capacity.

**Expanding Testing Capacity**

A comprehensive statewide testing plan, coupled with access to and administration of testing for COVID-19 is essential in order for the State to turn the curve. Presently, Maryland is not conducting enough testing. Statewide, the positivity rate of testing has

hovered around 20 percent for more than a month.<sup>1</sup> This is significantly higher than the national rate of six percent. In fact, Maryland has the third highest positivity rate in the nation, behind only Maine and Puerto Rico.<sup>2</sup> Public health experts recommend that a positivity rate of 12 percent or less would indicate that a jurisdiction is conducting enough tests to catch not only severe cases, but also mild and asymptomatic cases.<sup>3</sup>

A State testing plan—one that enumerates goals, sets expectations, outlines priorities, and provides guidance—would allow local governments to expand our testing programs more effectively in support of phased-in reopening. Moreover, we must have access to the full complement of testing, including lab capability, swabs and reagents. To that end, it is critical that a functional partnership between the State and local jurisdictions be established so we can ramp up capacity and ensure that more residents are tested.

#### ***Robust Contact Tracing Operation***

As testing increases, it will be imperative that we have an ample number of staff to test and engage in time-consuming contact tracing efforts. As you know, health experts believe this is key to slowing down and controlling the spread of COVID-19.

#### ***Increasing the Supply of PPE***

We need a State-led effort to mitigate our challenges in the face of national supply chain issues, and a cohesive and collective approach to identifying and distributing much needed PPEs throughout the State. As we look toward reopening both the public and private sectors of our economy, government workers, private businesses, healthcare workers, and residents will need access to PPE and other equipment.

#### ***Increasing Hospital Capacity***

Our jurisdictions and the State as a whole have had, by and large, sufficient hospital capacity due to early and aggressive actions. Given the outbreaks that have flared up in hot spots like nursing homes and in specific industries like poultry processing, we urge your continued support so that we are able to address capacity issues in real time.

Third, we wish to flag the following matters for your attention:

#### ***Nursing Home Monitoring***

As this correlates directly to the issue of hospital capacity, we have all sadly witnessed the challenges to controlling the spread of COVID-19 in our nursing homes. We need a stronger partnership with the State to help stabilize this situation since our nursing home facilities are home to so many of our State's vulnerable older residents. We must continue to direct sufficient resources to these facilities so that residents, families and employees stay safe.

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<sup>1</sup> See Johns Hopkins University & Medicine Coronavirus Resource Center, “All State View of Week to Week Percentage of Positive Tests” available at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/testing/individual-states/> (last accessed May 19, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> See Johns Hopkins University & Medicine Coronavirus Resource Center “Which U.S. States Meet Recommended Positivity Levels?” available at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/testing/testing-positivity> (last accessed May 19, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

**Fighting COVID-19 in Minority and Underserved Communities**

As is true for the State as a whole, in each of our jurisdictions, COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting communities of color. We must aggressively attack this challenge. As local leaders, we know these communities and want to help guide the State so that it is able to use its resources to better address this issue.

**Financial Recovery for Businesses and Individuals**

Maryland's economy depends on the financial success of its local jurisdictions. As you know, your Commerce department reports that our counties are collectively responsible for contributing 82% of the State's entire gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>4</sup> As we move into further phases of your reopening plan, we want to work closely with the State. Please direct your departments to partner with us so we can jointly strategically address economic recovery throughout our region.

In closing, every one of the undersigned executives believes that we lack sufficient resources to achieve our shared goal of safely reopening our jurisdictions, without limitations. While we all work furiously to implement comprehensive testing, increase contact tracing, and obtain more PPE for our residents, we need the State's leadership to ensure that Maryland's counties are not competing against one another on the open market. Accordingly, we ask you to please use the purchasing power of the State of Maryland to acquire sufficient resources to meet the needs you have identified as the pillars of your reopening plan.

We appreciate your time and attention to this letter and look forward to hearing from you and your office on these matters. And together we will keep Maryland Strong.



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Anne Arundel County



John A. Olszewski, Jr.  
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Bernard C. "Jack" Young  
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cc: Steve Schuh, Office of the Governor of Maryland

<sup>4</sup> See Maryland Department of Commerce, "Maryland GDP by County, 2015-2018." March 5, 2020 available at <https://commerce.maryland.gov/Documents/ResearchDocument/maryland-gdp-by-county-2020-03-05.pdf> (last accessed May 19, 2020).