



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

April 15, 2020

Dear Senators:

I write today to alert you about the devastating impact SB 613, PN 1636, or any other measure which would dilute the effectiveness of the statewide mitigation efforts, would have on the public health of Pennsylvanians. There is no doubt that this legislation would lead to more Pennsylvanians infected with COVID-19, as it undermines the integrity and effectiveness of the Commonwealth's collective response to this novel coronavirus. The health and safety of the public is our deepest and most serious responsibility as public servants. With respect, and with that responsibility in mind, I urge you and your colleagues to consider the impact SB 613, or any other legislation which would inhibit our statewide mitigation strategy, will have on the pandemic response and associated loss of human life.

The peak of COVID-19 cases has not yet been reached. The healthcare system has not yet been tested. But there is cause for hope. We are no longer seeing exponential growth in new cases each day. Our statewide mitigation has slowed the virus in areas of widespread community spread. There is still much work to do to continue to drive new cases down, but the trend we see now is encouraging. Even so, we expect the next few weeks to be very difficult for all Pennsylvanians – for essential employees, for families, for older Pennsylvanians, for business owners, and for healthcare workers. The only way to shorten the length of time we need to weather these conditions is through aggressive social distancing. To continue to bend the curve and ensure we can adequately and equitably care for our friends and neighbors during this pandemic, people need to stay home. If we turn back from this strategy too soon, all of that progress will be lost.

Encouraging increased social movement of Pennsylvanians at this time by reopening a significant amount of businesses would be reckless and irresponsible. Since Senate Bill 613 mandates the Commonwealth conform to the March 28th United States Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) advisory memorandum, a significant amount of businesses would likely reopen. In fact, there are very few industries outside of retail (which would also see large exemptions) that wouldn't be able to make an argument that they could open under this legislation. While the Governor and I are as eager as anyone to begin getting people back to work, doing so prematurely will only increase the spread of the virus, further lengthening associated economic challenges, while also placing more lives at risk.

As the Governor has said, these are unprecedented times, with no easy choices. The decision to shutter non-life sustaining businesses that support families across this commonwealth was a painful one, but before we can save livelihoods, we need to save lives. I ask, therefore, in the best interest of the public health, that you do not support this proposal or others that would dilute our statewide mitigation strategy.

I deeply appreciate your consideration and your dedication to your constituents through this crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'RLM'.

Rachel Levine, MD
Secretary of Health