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Open Letter to The Honorable Tate Reeves  
Governor of Mississippi  
July 31, 2020

Dear Governor Reeves,

The opening of schools for the 2020-21 school year is paramount on everyone's mind, and heart. Our state is in the grips of an unrelenting virus.

The American Federation of Teachers-Mississippi is very much concerned for the education of the students but, even more so, the safety of all students, faculty and staff, bus drivers, and all who are a part of the school community.

AFT-MS is requesting a delay to in-person teaching and learning, as not all schools are equipped to protect students and teachers at this time. Each school district is different, both financially and structurally.

Mississippi is now a Red Zone state and other states are requiring visitors from MS to self-quarantine when they arrive in their state. You, yourself, have increased the number of counties remaining under the state mandate of mask and social distancing to 37. Sir, that is almost half of the counties in the state.

We realize the possible hardship on families who work outside the home, but that cannot compare to the loss of a child to COVID-19 because he/she came to school. That includes teachers, or even family members being affected as well.

The science is clear. We do not have control of the virus; the virus has control of us.

Please rest assured that teachers have always been able to take students where they are and move them to where they need to be. That's our job. A delay to in-person learning will not handicap students to the point that they cannot recover.

Governor, as you deliberate on school openings, we hope that you would be circumspect in your decision.

Sincerely,

Geraldine Bender  
Geraldine Bender  
AFT-MS State President