



CITY OF HOUSTON

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Mayor

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June 30th, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of Texas
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Governor Abbott,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the needs of the City of Houston. As the largest municipality in the state, the needs of Houston present unique challenges of COVID 19.

This letter is urgently to request your help with the COVID-19 emergency in Houston/Harris County. We are eager to save lives, protect our hospital capacity, and support your efforts to reopen the economy by enacting appropriate safety measures.

Scientists, doctors and modelers at the University of Texas at Austin advise that on our current trajectory, Houston/Harris County could well exceed our COVID-19 hospital capacity of 1500 beds by mid-July. This estimate of 1500 hospital beds is derived from the number of licensed beds in area hospitals, minus neonatal and other beds inappropriate for COVID-19 patients, and reserving 40% of those adjusted licensed hospital beds for other crucial admissions (e.g., heart attacks, strokes, labor & delivery, etc.). These are the beds we have confidence we can properly staff.

These experts further advise that we have a small window (maybe 1-2 weeks) to change our behaviors and physical interactions so as to slow that trajectory. The more we can change behaviors and interactions, the more time we will have to maintain some measure of open economy while still protecting public health. This model demonstrates potential gains from significant behavior change, such as strict adherence to universal masking and distancing and greater limitations on physical interactions:

To avoid a “last resort” scenario, we respectfully request that you consider immediately ordering, or allowing local governments facing exponential growth in hospitalizations to order, the following:

1. Mandatory masking (for individuals when gathering with non-household members, inside or outside, not just through businesses and employers as currently authorized);

2. Removal of exceptions for gatherings over 100 and a reduction of the number of any social group gatherings from 100 to 50, or even 10;
3. Establishments such as “BYOB” or “gentlemen’s” clubs that are regulated separately from bars, should be subject to the same regulations and closures as bars;
4. Prohibit termination of an employee who stays home to isolate while waiting for a test result on those grounds;
5. Bowling alleys and gyms to 25%;

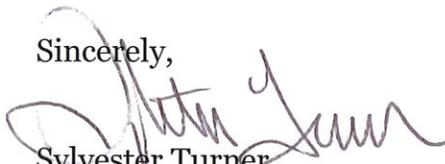
Finally, while we are seeing a rise in positive cases among all ethnicities, we are very concerned by the surge in positive cases and hospitalizations in our most vulnerable communities. The following measures would help address the severe outbreak in this community:

1. More isolation facilities so that construction and health care workers have the needed opportunity to isolate and not infect household members, particularly family members who are elderly or immune-compromised (one kind of significant cluster we are seeing);
2. More PPE or funds for PPE for vulnerable households;
3. Stipends for lost income for infected individuals who are isolating (so they in fact isolate rather than returning to work while infected or awaiting test results); and
4. More tests and more rapid lab response (test results in the area are now delayed up to 4-5 days, and by then are less beneficial for public health purposes).

Returning to a stay at home order, excepting essential businesses, should only be a last resort. It may well be better received if we can tell people the exact number of days we would be reengaging in this practice, followed by the reopening of schools (something that might otherwise be difficult to achieve), so long as when we reemerge this time it is done with universal, indefinite, and mandatory face masking and social distancing.

If the Governor is not able, given statewide duties, to order the above items in individual cities, it is requested that individual cities or MSAs working together be granted the ability to order such restrictions if their communities so desire

Sincerely,



Sylvester Turner
Mayor