

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 18, 2020

County Commissioners
Board of County Commissioners
Palm Beach County
301 N. Olive Avenue
West Palm Beach, FL 33401

Dear Commissioners,

We write you with a sense of urgency due to the spiking of COVID-19 cases in Palm Beach County and Florida. Scientists at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and the University of Pennsylvania predict that Florida could be the next epicenter of the disease. To help stem this imminent threat, we ask you to require masks to be worn in all essential indoor establishments and other locations as recommended by our county health officials. We further request that you step up all communications on CDC guidelines including social distancing, mask wearing, and hand washing.

On Monday, Florida recorded nearly 2,800 new COVID-19 cases, the highest number of new and confirmed cases in a single day. In Palm Beach County yesterday, there were 344 new cases and 12 deaths compared to 77 cases and 6 deaths two weeks ago. As of today, the County has 74 percent of its 319 beds occupied, and some hospitals have few or no adult ICU beds available. This is alarming and requires responsible actions by everyone.

No one should have to choose between our health and our economy – in fact, a healthy economy cannot exist without a healthy workforce and healthy customers. It is both unfair and unsafe that people who wear masks in supermarkets, drug stores and other businesses open to the public should be put at risk by those who do not.

It is not sufficient that Palm Beach County requires masks on public transit and in government buildings, but only “encourages” masks for other essential services. Sixteen states and the District of Columbia already require masks to be worn by employees and customers when accessing essential services and many localities have also implemented their own requirements. For example, Denver, Colorado issued a comprehensive order requiring facemasks to be worn by individuals in public spaces.ⁱ For your information, we have attached a link at the end of this letter with a list of Statewide orders as of June 18, 2020.ⁱⁱ

Symptomatic, pre-symptomatic, and asymptomatic people with COVID-19 can all be contagious via respiratory transmission, which is why the CDC recommends the use of face coverings to reduce the spread of the virus. According to a recent study published in a prominent health journal, states that required the use of face coverings have prevented 230,000 to 450,000 cases of COVID-19 between the dates of April 8 and May 15.ⁱⁱⁱ In fact, medical experts agree that wearing a mask reduces the risk of spreading or contracting the virus.

Unfortunately, it is evident that many people are not well informed about why masks and social distancing are important. We therefore urge you to intensify communications to the public on CDC guidelines, including social distancing, mask wearing, and hand washing. All of this is critical to ensure our businesses can remain open and workers and customers can remain safe.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. Our offices stand ready to assist your efforts.

Sincerely,



Lois Frankel
Member of Congress



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



Theodore E. Deutch
Member of Congress

Florida State Representatives:

/s/

Sen. Lori Berman (District 31)

Sen. Bobby Powell (District 30)

Sen. Kevin Rader (District 29)

Rep. Joe Casello (District 90)

Rep. Tina Polsky (District 81)

Rep. Rick Roth (District 85)

Rep. David Silvers (District 87)

Rep. Emily Slosberg (District 91)

Rep. Matt Willhite (District 86)

ⁱ See *Denver COVID-19 Information*, available at <https://www.denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/covid-19/recovery-guidance/face-covering.html>

ⁱⁱ Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, D.C., Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, and Virginia. See breakdown of state requirements available here,

<https://www.littler.com/publication-press/publication/facing-your-face-mask-duties-list-statewide-orders#:~:text=Employers%20must%20require%20employees%20to,social%20distancing%20is%20not%20possibl>

ⁱⁱⁱ See Wei Lyu & George L. Wehby, *Community Use of Face Masks and COVID-19: Evidence From a Natural Experiment of State Mandates in the U.S.*, Health Affairs (June 16, 2020),

<https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2020.00818>.