

May 5, 2020

The Honorable Tom Wolf
Governor of Pennsylvania
225 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf:

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission, representing the leadership in both the public and private sectors in the Counties of Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon and Somerset, and with a combined population of nearly a half million citizens, we herewith petition the Commonwealth to reexamine the COVID-19 Phased Reopening Plan as it presently establishes regions designated as Red, Yellow and Green. SAP&DC also recognizes and supports the separate petitions of Cambria and Somerset Counties to your office for reconsideration of their COVID-19/data as part of the Southwest region.

As is clear from the available medical information, the facts pertaining to our Southern Alleghenies Region compared to those counties also designated Red, reveal numerous inconsistencies in virtually all the relevant pandemic metrics, including: new infection rates, deaths (regardless of co-morbidities), positive/negatives testing ratios, ICU hospitalizations and the availability of ICU beds, intubations (including deployment of ventilators), (no) positive cases in long-term care facilities, and lastly, exposures of first responders to confirmed positive infections. Applying the Commonwealth's now-established reopening criteria, nearly every measure should allow our prudent reopening with aggressive mitigation, i.e., with Yellow status.

Let us make clear that we support every effort to contain and mitigate this contagion, to do everything to push back the pandemic so that all of Pennsylvania can return to a state of near normalcy. However, if the Southern Alleghenies Region, with its 50+ years of demonstrated cooperative leadership, vision and common demographics, were designated a distinct region consistent with the Commonwealth's Phased Reopening Plan, this would help speed Pennsylvania's economic recovery. Given the low COVID-19 pandemic metrics across the Southern Alleghenies Region, this makes abundant and objective sense. What is missing, be this in primarily urban, suburban or rural counties, is the need for testing. Accordingly, if the limited capacity for testing, including antibody testing, is deemed an essential component for earlier opening, than we seek the Commonwealth's help with providing test kits and related processing so that we are not placed at a further disadvantage.

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Our region's citizens and our businesses get it; the COVID-19 pandemic is real and will not go away, or even lessen without everyone's cooperation. We are disappointed that standards in place have punished many small, locally owned and operated businesses, while larger ones with similar product and service offerings, particularly big-box retailers (arguably substantially non-essential), have operated nearly without enforced restrictions. The long-term damage to small businesses cannot be overstated; this double standard too must be addressed quickly.

As with all Pennsylvanians, we applaud your leadership and that of Dr. Levine, whose daily briefings have been remarkably informative. While we may not agree with everything that is outlined in the Phased Reopening Plan, we firmly believe our reasons for this petition are entirely consistent with your efforts.

Thank you for your consideration of our viewpoint.

Respectfully,



Bruce R. Erb
President
Southern Alleghenies Planning & Development Commission



Steven K. Howsare
Executive Director
Southern Alleghenies Planning & Development Commission