



OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONERS AND MANAGER

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April 23, 2020

Governor Roy Cooper
1 East Edenton Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601

The Honorable Governor Roy Cooper:

Like many in our great state, we continue to keenly monitor the actions of our Federal, State, and local governments to address the COVID-19 pandemic. It is truly an unprecedented time for our residents, their families and businesses, and the governments elected to represent them. Thank you for your tireless leadership during this trying time for North Carolinians. We accept the mantle of leadership that comes in a crisis and send this letter as leaders of our community.

We write today, as a unified body of the Union County Board of County Commissioners, to implore you to re-open North Carolina. Health care threats are real. So are economic threats.

If anything has become clear over the last few weeks, it is that the particular needs and impacts of each community are different and rapidly changing. As the President has acknowledged by allowing the Governors of each state to shape the way a COVID-19 response looks in their state, we ask you to make that same recognition a reality in North Carolina and allow individual counties and municipalities to chart the best course for their jurisdictions. We ask for the liberty and responsibility to provide for the health, safety, welfare, and economic vitality of our county in the way that our residents and communities believe to be in their best interest.

Infection cases and rate of spread are vastly different in different communities. In one of our neighboring counties, Mecklenburg, there is a hot spot of COVID-19 infections, with the number of positive tests (as of this letter) at 1,331, with an infection rate of 121 positive cases per 100,000 residents. Union County, with its more rural population, has 179 total positive cases and an overall infection rate of 75 per 100,000 residents, a dramatic statistical difference. In two of our neighboring counties, Anson and Stanly, the number of infections is 19 and 22, respectively. In South Carolina, a state which borders Union County, there are 4,700 positive cases statewide versus 7,200 in North Carolina. South Carolina's Governor has made public and tangible progress in re-opening the entire state.

Similarly, the economic base of each area is different. Union County is the third highest agriculture producer in the state and is composed of many small and medium sized businesses. Mecklenburg County is dominated by large businesses, is the second largest banking center in the country, hosts a major international airport, and enjoys a significant and robust public transportation infrastructure. The Triangle is a research and technology hub, with several major universities, international connections, and large college student populations. The economies, population density, transportation patterns, and ways of life

are dramatically different in each of those areas. The laws governing how those jurisdictions respond to COVID-19 in the communities they know and love simply cannot – and should not – be singular in approach.

In your Executive Order 121, you said that you recognize “that the impact of COVID-19 has been and will likely continue to be different in different parts of North Carolina. Urban areas have seen more rapid and significant spread than most rural areas of the state.” We agree, and we encourage you to align any future Executive Orders with the reality that one solution will not fit everyone from Manteo to the mountains to everywhere in between, including Union County. Some of the business and industry closures brought about by Executive Order 121 are causing harm to Union County residents each day, and we suspect to others in the state as well.

For that very reason, Union County government has begun the process of re-opening its facilities to public access, albeit with workplace practices that acknowledge and are designed to minimize the spread of COVID-19. Since Executive Order 121 was signed on March 30, 2020, we have made full use of remote work technology, flex-scheduling, and other best practices that have proudly allowed us to continue to provide a seamless continuity of essential local government services. Our Emergency Operations Center, first responders, public works, and human services have remained fully staffed and responding to the needs of our residents for the past 40 days. We believe it is important to stand strong and provide the services our community needs and expects of its county government.

Protecting public health is important. Providing vibrant economic opportunities for everyone in our community is equally important. Equipping each of our residents to be able to provide for themselves and determine what is best for them and their families is perhaps most important.

Our residents have a right to expect laws and policies fitting for each county, city, and community in North Carolina. Every community is different; every business is different; every family is different. The people of North Carolina will suffer needless health and economic harm if the State continues to treat its diverse population with a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to fully embrace differences in population density, infection rates, and economic vitality. Lives and livelihoods are at stake.

Please re-open North Carolina. And when you do, please continue to support each county, city, and community with good data, essential funding, impactful research findings, and quality public health support. But please allow Union County, and each county, to determine how best to deploy those resources for the well-being of their own residents.

Respectfully,



Jerry B. Simpson, Chairman



Dennis Rape, Vice Chairman



Frank H. Aikmus, Commissioner



Richard B. Helms, Sr., Commissioner



Stony D. Rushing, Commissioner