

City of Richmond



LEVAR M. STONEY
MAYOR

May 14, 2020

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam
Governor of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Northam:

On Monday, May 11, at my request, the Director of the Richmond City Health District requested the support of the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) with developing a city equivalent of the statewide percent positivity ratio your administration has cited as an important metric and justification for entering Phase One of reopening the Commonwealth of Virginia. As of May 13, after a call between our staffs, this analysis is still unavailable to the City of Richmond due to VDH's inability to provide the number of tests completed by date for our locality. Moreover, the data we do have, specifically positive case count, indicates that Richmond's number of individual cases has doubled in the past two weeks.

While I am hopeful that this increase is in part due to the expanded testing we have worked collaboratively to provide for our community, without access to total testing data and the ability to watch that trend over time, I cannot conclude that Richmond's percent positivity ratio is moving in the right direction. 16 out of 18 deaths in Richmond have been African American. Where we know the race of our positive residents, African Americans have three times the disease incidence as Whites. Where we know the ethnicity of our cases, Hispanic and Latinx Richmonders make up an outsize proportion, representing 23% of cases while only accounting for 6-7% of our total population. Additionally, an analysis using zip code data shows that a higher percentage of positive cases are found in the parts of our city with persistent rates of social and economic hardship.

To be clear – I want to reopen our city. However, we should only take that step when there are adequate protections for our most vulnerable communities. That is why I am writing to formally request that VDH provide locally coded testing data for the City of Richmond and the Central Virginia Region. Until we can establish percent positivity over time and use the same metrics as the state, we cannot effectively monitor whether we should continue to move forward with the various phases of reopening, or if we need to reassess. This data should be critical to our joint decision-making. If this data cannot be provided, then I cannot justify risking the health and safety of the residents of the City of Richmond by moving forward with Phase One.

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It is my hope that you will provide us with the data we need and that the data will show a decline in the positivity rate. If we are able to move forward in coordination with your administration, I request three additional measures. First, that VDH expand COVID-19 testing capacity in the City of Richmond, especially in our most vulnerable communities, and commit to offering testing at previously identified sites. By doing so, we can get a more accurate picture of how this virus is impacting all of our communities and better understand our percent positivity ratio over time.

Second, that VDH consider working with our business community to ensure robust contact tracing efforts. Specifically, I ask that you review Governor Inslee's [requirement](#) of restaurants to maintain a daily log of phone numbers, emails, and arrival times of dine-in patrons. This effort would facilitate a rigorous method of tracing and monitoring those who may have been exposed to COVID-19.

Lastly, I strongly suggest you make it a requirement that Virginians must wear a face covering while in a public space or visiting an essential business. We must do everything in our power to protect our essential workers, and each other, from spreading COVID-19. States such as Connecticut and New York have already implemented similar approaches requiring all residents over age two to wear masks or face coverings when they're in public and social distancing isn't possible. We should follow their example in Virginia.

I appreciate your consideration of this request for additional data and additions to Phase One requirements. As you are aware, the unique nature of Richmond's dense urban environment and the disparate impact this disease is having on our Black and Brown communities merits consideration for Richmond's unique position and responsibilities to its residents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Levar M. Stoney". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Levar M. Stoney
Mayor