



July 10, 2020

Speaker Larry Householder
Ohio House of Representatives
77 S. High Street
Columbus OH 43215

Dear Speaker Householder,

We write to you to express our serious concerns for the current policies, procedures, and protocols the Ohio House of Representatives is operating under for the protections of the health, safety, and welfare of both members and staff in regards to the coronavirus.

First and foremost, we would like to request a briefing for our leadership team from you and Chief Administrative Officer, Kim Hartman. There is clearly confusion and a lot of finger-pointing as to what information is shared, when it is shared and who is responsible for sharing that information.

This week we learned that a Republican House aide has tested positive for COVID-19 and a number of House staff have been sent home to self-quarantine and test for the coronavirus. We understand that the majority of these staffers are employed by the Republican caucus. However, this information was only shared with the Minority Chief of Staff because a Democratic staffer was misidentified as having had contact with the infected individual. At this point, as members of the Ohio House of Representatives, we do not know how many staff or members have been diagnosed with the coronavirus. News reports quote your office as saying they cannot disclose the number of positive cases. It is simply unacceptable that we do not know the impact this pandemic is having and has had on our own workplace.

On Monday, July 6, we requested that Ms. Hartman join our bi-weekly member call on Tuesday, July 7 to review these policies and answer questions. We were informed that the Majority Chief of Staff would not allow her to join that call and that she is only authorized to communicate with staff. The inability of our members to receive direct information from the House Chief Administrative Officer is troubling and has certainly impeded members' access to information and a full understanding of office protocols.

Second, we ask that you work with our caucus to develop a clear and transparent reporting system to notify members and staff when staff have tested positive and/or when staff have been quarantined due to direct contact with an infected individual. While staff have been sent back to work-from-home status, there are still staff working out of the Riffe Building and, given the need

to keep working legislatively, there will be times when members and limited staff will need to return to the Riffe Building and the Statehouse.

Third, we ask that you also work with us to establish the most stringent of workplace policies for the eventual return of staff to the Riffe Building, including the directive that all staff must wear facemasks or face coverings while in public areas. The City of Columbus has issued a mask mandate for the entire city and the Governor has issued a mask mandate for all of Franklin County. The Centers for Disease Control, the American Hospital Association, the American Medical Association, and the American Nurses Association have all called for the wearing of masks in public. Until these local and state mandates are retracted, it is essential that we follow these directives. Wearing a mask is one of the simplest of steps to stop the spread of this disease, and all staff should be instructed to take this common-sense measure for their safety and the health and safety of those with who they work with and serve.

Finally, our staff deserve to have policies in place that are easy to understand and predictable. Our current telework policy for staff is only at the call of you, the Speaker, both for sending staff to work from home and for calling them back. What might trigger those calls are entirely unknown to both members and staff. It is time that we use the information available to us to set out clear parameters that would necessitate sending staff back to work from home or calling them back to work out of the Riffe Building. We ask that you work with us to establish criteria using current data that shows the level of exposure and/or potential exposure to effectuate a requirement for staff as to when they are required to work in the office and when they are to work from home.

Mr. Speaker, we are asking you to help us ensure that the Ohio House of Representatives is doing everything it can to protect the health, safety, and welfare of members, the staff, and the public we serve. The current process has not been smooth or transparent. There is still important work that needs to be done by the Ohio House of Representatives, but we need to tackle the coronavirus in our workplace before anyone can be expected to return to fulfill their duties. The health of our staff and members is of utmost importance, and we would appreciate you working with us to implement these suggestions as well as considering other issues we have identified to you in creating an adequate, fair and safe work environment. We have several members with substantial experience and education in the fields of health and medicine who would be happy to work with you in developing these policies.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Rep. Emilia Sykes, Minority Leader
House District 34



Rep. Kristin Boggs, Assistant Minority Leader
House District 18



Rep. Paula Hicks-Hudson, Minority Whip
House District 44



Rep. Rich Brown, Assistant Minority Whip
House District 20

cc: Jonathon McGee, Chief of Staff/Majority Legal Counsel
Kim Hartman, Chief Administrative Officer
Sam Herd, Minority Chief of Staff