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April 13, 2020

The Honorable Philip D. Murphy
Governor of the State of New Jersey
Office of the Governor
225 W. State Street
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy,

We are writing to you today regarding our concerns for the treatment of Morris County in the formulaic allocation of funds from the Coronavirus Relief Fund, and to bring these concerns to your attention as you determine how to deploy New Jersey's direct payment from this fund.

As you are aware, \$3.44 billion is expected to be allocated to New Jersey from the Coronavirus Relief Fund, established by the CARES Act, which was signed into law by the President on March 27th. This consists of a direct payment to the state, as well as additional payments to New Jersey counties with populations greater than 500,000 people. Morris County, with a population just below 500,000, is not expected to receive a direct payment from the federal government, and thus will have to rely on a share of the state's distribution.

We do not believe a distinction can be made between the efforts and investment required by Morris County, with a population of 491,845 in 2019, and other only slightly more populous counties receiving the direct payment like Passaic County with 501,826 citizens and Camden County with 506,343. Morris County currently has the ninth highest number of positive cases of all 21 counties in New Jersey, and the sixth highest number of deaths from COVID-19, with 162 deaths as of April 13th versus 136 in Passaic County and 35 in Camden County. Also, and of greater significance, the Morris County mortality rate, comparing deaths to those testing positive for the virus, is currently 33% higher than the entire State.

Like the other counties of a similar size, Morris County has had to confront this crisis on numerous fronts including:

- Formally initiating the Morris County OEM and Public Health Response beginning in late February;
- Establishing outside COVID-19 testing sites at Morristown Medical Center, Chilton Hospital, Dover General Hospital, and St. Clare's Hospital helping to ensure that potentially infected individuals remain outside the perimeter of those critical facilities;
- The immediate hiring of an Epidemiologist;
- Standing up a COVID-19 testing site at the County College of Morris last month with no support of PPE, testing kits, or other materials as supplied to other counties;
- Supporting the needs of both the Atlantic HealthCare Hospital System and the Prime HealthCare Hospital System;

- Accepting and medically treating out of county adult inmates, juvenile offenders, and Children in Crisis, in the respective Morris County facilities, resulting in the spread of the virus within the County's Correctional Facility, Juvenile Detention and Youth Shelter operational staff, further resulting in significant staff illness, significant overtime costs, and significant sanitizing costs;
- Stretching professional resources beyond the realm of reasonability by serving as the Medical Examiner for three counties;
- Having to accept over 60 COVID-19 positive residents of long-term care facilities from outside of Morris County as directed by the New Jersey Department of Health;
- Standing up multiple temporary morgues within the various hospitals;
- Responding to the increased demand and associated costs relative to the Morris County 911 Communication Center, processing over 8,132 calls since the initial Executive Order 104;
- Processing, responding, and incurring the related costs to over 1,937 EMS emergencies of which 901 were determined to be potential COVID-19 responses, requiring full PPE since the beginning of the pandemic;
- Establishing and supporting temporary housing facilities for Community Based Human Service residential providers addressing the needs of the Homeless, DDD, and Behavioral Health populations;
- Redirecting the Senior Nutrition Program from a congregate and home delivered operation to sole home delivered operation significantly increasing operational costs;
- Continuing to provide life sustaining transportation services via the County's paratransit program placing staff at considerable risk as well as incurring significant sanitizing expenses relative to all transportation vehicles;
- Attempting to address the increasing demand for Temporary Assistance services relative to increased applications for programs like SNAP, while dealing with reduced staff due to COVID-19 and office closures to sanitize their space;
- Understanding that the Federal Government's emergency stockpile of personal protective equipment is depleted and understanding that the State will not be receiving further shipments, having to expend exorbitant funds to purchase said PPE for local healthcare and first responder disciplines;
- Providing Emergency Funding to the four local Food Pantries that operate five days per week;

We strongly urge you to provide direct stabilization funding to Morris County from the Coronavirus Relief Fund in an amount consistent to that which is provided to counties like Passaic County and Camden County with just over 500,000 in population by the formula laid out in the CARES Act. This funding is critical to Morris County's ability to continue their efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and work to keep our constituents safe.

Thank you for your attention to this issue and for the work you are doing for New Jersey as we face this unprecedented crisis.

Sincerely,



Senator Anthony M. Bucco



Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress



Senator Richard J. Codey

cc: Morris County Freeholder Director Deborah Smith
Morris County Freeholder Deputy Director Stephen H. Shaw

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