



PRESBYTERIANS FOR A BETTER GEORGIA

1026 Ponce de Leon Ave. NE

Atlanta, GA 30306

Governor Brian Kemp
206 Washington Street
Suite 203, State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334
United States

Re: Premature Reopening of the Economy

April 22, 2020

Dear Governor Kemp,

Presbyterians for a Better Georgia is a partnership of Presbyterian Church (USA) congregations which have prioritized increased access to quality health care for all. As a Governor who has a great love of churches, you recognize that we follow a savior who was a healer and who called us to care for the vulnerable amongst us. **We are writing to encourage you to tap the brakes on the reopening of the economy.**

We understand the pressure you are under and the anxiety Georgians feel regarding their inability to work, but it feels premature and risky to lift the stay-at-home parameters you put in place to keep Georgians safe. Using Washington School of Medicine's IHME Model, Dr. Carlos Del Rio, an infectious disease expert at Emory University, acknowledges the good news that we have likely passed the 'peak' of hospital bed utilization capacity and that social distancing is working. But he also noted that these measures need to be kept in place until June 15. Additionally, the Trump administration released CDC guidance saying that states need to have 14 days of declining new cases before they begin easing restrictions. Georgia has not crossed that threshold.

The risk of a second peak puts Georgians at risk. And the opening of bowling alleys, hair salons, tattoo parlors, restaurants (for sit down dining), movie theaters, etc. places workers at risk of contracting and spreading the virus. These workers, who have little power to say no to returning, are predominantly low wage workers. **The burden of "opening the economy" is placed unfairly upon low wage workers and their families.**

Additionally, the potential of a second peak puts our health care workers at risk and threatens a second chance at overburdening our healthcare system. Our healthcare professionals have worked selflessly, at tremendous personal risk, to care for ailing Georgians. It is unjust to expect them to continue to put their own health and families' health on the line while the state goes back to business as usual. As an organization that, at its core, believes that all people should have access to healthcare, we cannot support actions which will strain our healthcare system and put Georgians at risk from receiving the care they need.

As a community of churches, we hold the freedom to worship as one of our highest values. But it is not higher than the life, health, and safety of our members and our neighbors. **We will choose to continue to worship online and refrain from public gatherings until our public health experts tell us it is safe to do so. We ask you to express these same priorities in your leadership of the people of Georgia.**

This is certainly an unprecedented time, and there is a tension between the health of our population, and the health of our economy. But the current plan to roll back stay-at-home measures beginning Friday, April 24, unfairly risks the lives of healthcare workers and lower wage earners. We pray that you will reconsider these actions.

Sincerely,

Rev. Shelli Latham
Chair, Presbyterians for a Better Georgia