

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: September 16th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. We're going to bounce around among a bunch of different topics today. I'm joined by the woman on my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, the State's Epidemiologist and other familiar face, Dr. Christina Tan. Thank you both for being here, as always. Guy to my left needs no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police Colonel, Pat Callahan. We have an APB out for the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness Jared Maples, who does not appear to be with us. Judy, you're going to have to track that down.

Good afternoon, everyone. First, I must wish everyone a very happy Arts in Education Week. One of the reasons we're home to the number one public schools in the nation is because we were the first state ever to ensure universal access to the arts. So no matter what your artistic talent may be, you can let it shine in New Jersey, and our hats are off to all the arts educators across the state.

On a far more sober and somber note, today also marks the one-year anniversary since the disappearance of that blessed gal, five-year-old Dulce Alavez, from a park in Bridgeton. Law enforcement -- and I know Pat knows this well and Dulce's family continue their search -- all of us are hoping and praying for her safe return home. Anyone who has any information is urged to call the New Jersey State Police at that number, 609-882-2000 extension 2554. Please keep that gal and her family in your deepest prayers and be on the lookout for her for a safe return.


back
to top

Next, going to the other end of the spectrum, on Monday night we saw perhaps our most extreme -- which is saying something, by the way -- and egregious display of knucklehead behavior in Seaside Heights, set off by a group of YouTube pranksters who succeeded in getting the notoriety they wanted, but obviously don't deserve. The scene of hundreds of young people -- my team says nearly 1,000 by some counts, I had even well north of 1,000 Pat, from other sources -- crowded around a corner in Seaside Heights, largely unmasked, definitely not social distancing. It's exactly the type of situation we cannot have. It was irresponsible from top to bottom in every respect. And these so-called influencers need to be taken to task, and New Jersey was just the latest stop on their tour of willful negligence for public health in a pandemic.

Moreover, the local police resources that were needed to disperse the crowd were substantial, and I know the State Police also got involved to keep traffic and other things moving. Multiple towns, I think Pat seven or eight, sending in their officers to help because of the crowd size. So I thank all the members of law enforcement who responded on Monday night, and by the way, they were put in harm's way. Particularly when you look at these crowds, you cannot help be up close with folks when you've got something like that.

I had a good exchange this morning with my good friend Mayor Tony Vaz in Seaside Heights, and I know he's pulling his hair out over what happened on Monday as well, as well as the chief, who's another friend. I urge anyone -- this is important -- anyone who was in that crowd to go get tested. That kind of gathering is how coronavirus spreads most easily. And just because you're young and seemingly invincible doesn't mean you actually are, or that you can't spread the virus onto someone who may be particularly vulnerable if you yourself are not symptomatic

As Judy pointed out last week, the positivity rates -- and I think she's going to hit this again today -- among young people are roughly three times that of the statewide daily averages. Three times. Again, we think the system is working as it relates to back to school. That's the really good news. The overwhelming amount of evidence is it's outside the school walls where we're having our troubles, and this is as good an example as any. It'll be a couple of weeks, by the way, I think Tina, you would agree with that, 10 days to two weeks at least, before we know whether or not the Seaside Heights unwillingly became a coronavirus hotspot because of these knuckleheads, who I hope don't come back to New Jersey and certainly aren't welcome.

But again, let's use some common sense for the common good. Let's stop with the house parties and irresponsible behavior. Let's get back to what we know works and by the way, you can have fun, just please be outside, wear something on your face and stay as far apart as we are here. That doesn't mean you can't have a good time. But we can't see more of that.

Okay, moving back to better news, yesterday the Department of State announced that because of all you all have been proactively doing in responding to the 2020 census, New Jersey's current self-response rate of 68.1% is the highest we have achieved in the past four censuses going back to 1990. And because so many of you are also working with census takers going door to door to those houses that hadn't yet responded, our statewide response rate when you add self-reporting to the door-to-door reality is now over 92%. There are still at least 15 days left to be counted, so if you've not yet done so, take a moment to go to 2020census.gov and get counted. The more people who self-respond online, the fewer doors census takers have to knock. But again, congratulations and thanks to everyone who has responded and made this a record year.

Next, and staying with the Department of State, I want to reiterate a message put out yesterday by our terrific Secretary of State Tahesha Way regarding this year's election. As Secretary Way noted, most New Jerseyans have received a copy of this mailer from the United States Postal Service in their mailboxes. But to be clear, this is a broad-based mail piece that is not specific to New Jersey's election. So, several points.

First, you do not need to request a vote-by-mail ballot, one will be sent directly to you, assuming you're registered.

Secondly, you do not need to worry about return postage for your ballot. The ballot you receive will include a return postage-paid envelope.

And third, if you choose not to, you don't even need to use the postal service to return your ballot. As we've said many times, you could drop it in any of the secure drop boxes in your county. And by the way, check your county clerk's office for the location of a lockbox closest to you. You can also hand your ballot in to one of the poll workers at your local polling place on Election Day.

Or, you can do none of the above and walk up and vote in person on Election Day using a paper ballot.

We have done everything possible to make voting easier and safer, given the challenges we are facing from this pandemic. And don't forget if you need to register to vote, you can now do so online at elections.nj.gov. The registration deadline is October 13th.

Next, switching gears again, the list of states from which travelers to New Jersey are being advised to observe a 14-day self-quarantine period was updated yesterday. The 30 states and territories in red have over seven-day rolling average, either more than 10 new cases of coronavirus per 100,000 residents, or a daily positivity greater than 10%. And again, these are either/or but they are seven-day rolling averages. Please visit covid19.nj.gov/travel to learn whether you should be self-quarantining and to fill out the Department of Health's travel survey. And by the way, that goes for visitors to New Jersey and New Jerseyans who have visited one of those states and have returned.

With that, Judy, let's look at our overnight numbers. We are reporting an additional 447 positive test results for a combined total of 197,792 since our first case was confirmed on March 4th. That's the second day in a row over 400. We haven't had a 400 day in a few and now we've had two in a row. We'd love to get your thoughts on that, Judy and Tina, when you get the mic. The positivity rate for all tests recorded on September 12th was just over 2, 2.06%. Statewide rate of transmission is flat over the past several days at 1.06.

In our hospitals as of last night's report there were 462 patients being treated, and that broke down 226 are known COVID positive, 236 were persons under investigation pending the return of a test result. Of that number, 100 were requiring intensive care, 38 ventilators were in use.

And today, with a heavy heart, we're reporting nine additional losses of life bringing the total confirmed deaths to 14,263. The number of probable deaths has been revised to 1,791. That, by the way, is an increase of two over the past week.

Judy, I'm showing of the nine we're reporting confirmed today, seven are from the past four days. And again, at the risk of apples and oranges, our hospitals reported 13 deaths yesterday. Again, those are not in the COVID-confirmed numbers, but we want to give you a sense of what the spot reality looks like. Now, as we do every day, let's take a couple of minutes to remember a few of the blessed New Jersey souls we have lost.

We begin today by remembering Dave Rivara. David is one of those whose death is still listed as probable, as he was unable to receive a test before his passing, and the entire family later tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies. David lived in Glen Rock, but he will be forever tied to the family restaurant he inherited from his father at the age of 20, and that which he would run for the next 40 years, Victor's Maywood Inn, which in 2013 was rechristened Maywood's Twin Door Tavern.

Through his restaurant, David became part of the backbone of the community, not just Maywood, but throughout Bergen County. Everyone who entered felt like family, like they knew David, and knew they could rely on him and his staff to provide for a great meal. Dave was only 60 years old and still had so much more to give back to the customers he loved, and still had so much more to give, especially for his own family.

So he leaves behind his wife Cindy, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday, and daughters Christina – Christina is a junior in the hospitality school at Cornell University, I think the nation's, if not the world's, finest hospitality school; and Victoria, with whom I had the honor as well of speaking with on Monday who just graduated from Ramapo and is now working with mom. He also leaves behind stepsons Daniel and Ryan. He is further survived by his sisters Maria, Rita, and brothers Frank, Victor and Joseph, along with eight nieces and nephews. Speaking to Cindy, we had a long conversation not just about Dave and his legacy in the restaurant and her daughters, but can you imagine the double reality of losing a loved one as they did with their dad and husband, and running a restaurant in the middle of this awful pandemic? God bless them all and we wish them continued success. If you're in the neighborhood, it would be a really great sign of support for this guy's memory and for Cindy and her daughters to give a swing by Maywood's Twin Door Tavern. I promised her when I could I would do that and have something to eat or drink, or both. We thank David for feeding Maywood's community and being a central part of that community across four decades. May his legacy of hospitality live on and may God bless and watch over him.

Next today we remember a couple, Stephen and Jane Raitt of Bloomfield. They were married for 53 years and COVID-19 took them both in the span of two weeks. They had spent most of their married life in Michigan, where Stephen was an entrepreneur and sales executive. Jane was a New Jersey gal. She was a native born and raised in Newark, and a graduate of Fairleigh Dickinson University. She was an entrepreneur in our own right and sales executive, as well as a teacher and career coach. And in fact, as a teacher – this is a really cool one – in 1971, I believe pregnant with their son Jason, there was a law in Michigan, Judy, that said if you were showing a bump you could no longer teach. She challenged that law. It was overturned and her victory remains on the books today in Michigan.

They settled when they got back to Jersey in Bloomfield in 2016. They both took to retirement, enjoying time with family and friends but Jane, ever active, became a volunteer and community activist, including helping create a dog park in West Bloomfield. She was an active member of Temple Shir Shalom in West Bloomfield and later Temple Ner Tamid in Bloomfield. Her kids told me when they did the online Shiva, more than 500 people participated.

They leave behind their daughter Marni, who's in New York City, and their son Jason, and I had the honor of speaking with each of them on Monday. Also Jason's husband Kelly, along with their grandson, Jesse. Jane is survived further by her sister Judy. Jane would have celebrated her 77th birthday yesterday; Stephen's birthday would have been October 12th. And by the way, they met at Tanglewood in the Berkshires in Western Massachusetts, and I'm not making this up, with Stephen literally on his way, I guess to get a drink or something tripped, literally tripped over Jane. That's the beginning of an extraordinary relationship. May both of their memories be a blessing and as our Jewish community prepares for the High Holy Days, may their names be repeated and remembered.

As we know that this virus has now claimed a confirmed total of 14,263 blessed souls, and by all indicators, nearly 1,800 others, they should all be remembered and honored. None should ever just be considered a number. Even as we have seen the numbers of deaths head into the low single-digits, each day we cannot let up. No one is expendable. This is why we cannot excuse, in any way, the irresponsible and reckless behavior that I spoke about and we saw earlier this week.

Next, I want to continue with another of our daily practices, and that is acknowledging some of the great small businesses from around our state who have partnered with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to ensure their future. Today the spotlight is on the Little Gym of Montgomery in Hillsborough, in Somerset County, owned by William and Ada Young, and I had the great chance to speak with Ada on Monday. The Little Gym is a gym specifically for children, and William and Ada have sought to create a happy place where kids can learn and build skillsets, express confidence and start on a lifetime love of motion and exercise. The Little Gym also puts a special emphasis on character building and making sure that everyone has a place regardless of their ability, age or background.

Obviously, when the pandemic hit, the Little Gym had to temporarily close its doors. Through the EDA, William and Ada were able to secure an emergency assistance loan that allowed them to pay business expenses to keep their current employees on payroll and expand their team by two employees. The Little Gym reopened its doors in July to provide summer programs for the families and children it serves, and I know they're looking forward to many more good years ahead. I had a great conversation with Ada on Monday and I asked her permission if we could throw their website out there. Check it out yourself, go by, give her a visit, give them some business. It's TheLittleGym.com. And then when you pull that up, you punch in their zip code, which is 08844. Good luck to Ada and William and the whole team there.

Finally today, I want to note the passing of an American hero who was a proud part of our New Jersey family. Tuskegee Airman Malcolm Nettingham of Scotch Plains passed away on Monday at the age of 101, just two-and-a-half weeks shy of his 102nd birthday. He joined the army in 1944 and was selected to integrate a radio communication class in the Army Air Corps, what later became the United States Air Force. He trained at Fort Dix as a radio operator and a gunner aboard a B-52 Bomber. He was honorably discharged in 1946 and went on to have a 32-year career in the electronics industry.

In 2007 he was presented with the Congressional Gold Medal by the late Senator – another World War II veteran and dear friend of ours – Frank Lautenberg. In fact, Frank was the last World War II veteran to serve in the United States Senate.

He was also a man of great faith. Malcolm was a member of the Metropolitan Baptist Church of Scotch Plains, modest time as a parishioner there, as a congregant. He was a member there for 96 years. And we know that his faith has been rewarded. Malcolm was profiled by Star-Ledger Columnist Barry Carter, another giant, when he turned 100. His words on that day, and by the way repeated by Malcom's daughter, Debbie, to me on the phone this morning, one of the secrets to his longevity and I quote him, "Treat your neighbor as you would treat yourself." Boy, that's good advice. Better words could never be spoken, and they have special resonance today. So may God bless you, Malcolm, and thank you for your service to our nation and lifetime commitment to our state. You made us all so, so, very, very proud.

With that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. As the Governor stated, we are concerned about transmission of COVID-19 among our younger population. We are continuing to see case numbers climb among young people. Many of these cases and clusters are a result of parties and social gatherings. Although generally symptoms associated with COVID-19 are milder in children compared with adults, we do see more severe cases and even deaths in this population.

A CDC study released yesterday examined 121 deaths among individuals under the age of 21. 70% of those deaths were aged 10 to 20. More than 40% were among ages 18 to 20; 74% of these deaths were among Hispanic and Black children in adolescence. 75% had underlying medical conditions, such as asthma, obesity, neurologic and developmental conditions, and some cardiovascular issues. This study demonstrates that those under 21 are still vulnerable to COVID-19. The deaths examined showed a disproportionate impact on those aged 18 to 20, a disproportionate impact on racial and ethnic minorities, and on individual youth with underlying conditions.

However, all young people should be taking precautions to protect their health and the health of others. In New Jersey, we have seen the percent positivity increase substantially among our youth. Around the middle of August, the percent positivity among 14 to 18-year-olds was 3%. It's now up to 7%. And for the 19-to-24-year-old population, the positivity has risen from 2.7% in mid-August to 7.1% currently.

Thankfully, the number of deaths in those under 21 is small, but we still number eight; but about 71% of those deaths are among those ages 18 to 20, and the majority of these individuals did have underlying conditions, which is similar to what the nation is experiencing.

With schools and colleges reopening, this is just a reminder, please take this virus seriously. Now is not the time for indoor parties or large gatherings. These activities allow the virus to spread. We need your help to stop the transmission in our state. Stay at least six feet apart from one another, wear a face covering, wash your hands frequently or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. And if you feel sick, please stay home.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 462 hospitalizations with 100 individuals in critical care and 38% of them on ventilators. Thankfully, there are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. Our cases remain at 57.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths. In terms of race and ethnicity, we are seeing the same percentages, White 54.1%, Black 18.3%, Hispanic 20.3%, Asian 5.5%, other 1.9%. The state veterans homes numbers remain the same and at the state psychiatric hospitals, the numbers remain as I reported previously.

The percent positivity as of September 12th in New Jersey as a whole is 2.06%. The Northern part of the state reports 1.36, the Central part of the state 2.69, the southern part of the state 2.45. That concludes my daily report. As always, stay safe and remember for each other and for us all, please take the call. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, well said and again, as I said earlier, the system is working inside the walls in our schools and that's a good thing, and I know that you and the local health authorities are staying all over any data that we see. It's the stuff that's going on outside of the school walls that is our concern. You know, I'm not going to make a prediction here, but I defer to you all. We're not remotely close, and I don't know when we'll get there, of packed congregating around a bar, either inside in a bar or a restaurant. We're not close to

that. So what makes people think that a house party is any different than that? Because that's what that is, right? And we've got to avoid that like the plague. Thank you also for always shining a light on the enormous inequities that this virus has uncovered.

Jared Maples is with us. And in fact, I should have known this, we were kidding sending out an APB for you earlier, but it's good to see you. You all had pulled together an election security meeting including with state and local and county stakeholders, so thank you for that. That's something we take obviously deadly seriously.

Pat, you've got a lot on your plate. Compliance, I know you had a chiefs call yesterday, you've got another call coming up tomorrow. We had the Seaside Heights reality. We've got weather, we've got forest fires. By the way, the smog that we're seeing around the state is actually from those fires on the West Coast. Hard to believe, but we've got 10 of our best out there fighting away. Take it away, please.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor Good afternoon. With regard to EO compliance to the Governor's point with regard to packed bars, the Blue Ribbon Inn in Hillside, the owner was cited. Police responded to a noise complaint and found more than 25% capacity, patrons unmasked and not socially distanced, so that owner was cited.

Seaside Heights, obviously the Governor referenced, eight subjects were cited for various charges, mostly disorderly persons from the throwing of bottles and rocks at police officers. We did have a call yesterday with law enforcement just to gain the municipal perspective from EO compliance and various responses. It really is generally pretty quiet around the state, with the exception of those few pop-up parties. We do have a call, Director Maples, The Attorney General and myself have a virtual meeting tomorrow with all of our federal law enforcement partners, as well as major city police chiefs and some other police chiefs. It's generally a quarterly meeting, but we're getting together tomorrow. Certainly EO compliance will be one of the issues on the agenda.

The 10 forest fire service members are on the line as we speak, keep knocking on wood that they're doing safe and helping California out. Sally is currently battering the Gulf Coast. We do have one member from OEM down there assisting the incident support team down there. We do have Teddy, which we think is following Hurricane Paulette out to sea, which we're keeping our fingers crossed on that. We continue to monitor the EMAC requests that come in from around the country, and as we discussed on Monday, Gov, where we can support without draining our resources, we're known probably around the country as the most supportive state in the entire union, from Hawaii to Texas to California to Florida to Puerto Rico to Virgin Islands. When the bell rings, we typically do go regardless of the request, so we continue to monitor those, Governor. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen. To repeat something that we said on Monday and you alluded to, it could be folks who are at the front line, at the point of attack, as Taskforce 1 was in Louisiana a few weeks ago, as our forest fire brothers and sisters are as we speak, or it could be a supportive logistic or other supportive role that allows that particular state or some other state's resources to free up to do a different task.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: That's right. Even the one I saw this morning was for a public information officer to assist with the release of information to keep the public informed. In any of those capacities, if we can help, we certainly will.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen. And again, the only thing we've got to balance is we've got to make sure we've got a full cupboard in case we get hit with some sort of a natural disaster ourselves. Thank you for that, thank you all. We'll buzz through, we'll start over here with you, Dustin, in a second but I just want to -- we're on the regular rhythm this week, so tomorrow we'll be virtual. I'm going to be traveling around the state a little bit tomorrow. I think I'll have an opportunity to in person with members of the press to deliver the overnight numbers, Judy, on your and our behalf. And then we'll be together Friday unless you hear otherwise at one o'clock in this room.

I have the honor right after this to sign several bills into law and I want to salute our Legislative partners for getting them to us. Is it this room or next door? Next door, sorry, related to long-term care. This is a great example of Judy hired the Manatt firm, nationally recognized expert in this arena. They went out and they gave us a bunch of recommendations, some of which we could take on our own and we have, others of

which needed statute and legislation. We're going to sign four of those bills after this, and these are big steps forward to make sure that we live, we learn, that we can address what was an uneven performance in that industry and put some pieces in place that will have permanent significance and will allow us to weather future storms. So with that, Dustin, Good afternoon.

Q&A Session

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Good afternoon. On that specifically, what kind of effect do you think those bills that you're signing today will have if a second wave comes this fall or winter? Do you think that the measures will have an immediate impact or might take some more time?

There's a rally today at the Menlo Park Veterans Home, and the VFW has said that you have not done enough to demand accountability for the high death toll and disturbing practices at the home. You've said that there will be a full accounting, but do you plan to do anything besides that?

And on this issue of problems with high transmission rates among younger people, how do you know with authority that the system is working in the schools but the problem on younger people is beyond the schools? Because I had thought that you said that it would take some time for school-related issues to show up. Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Dustin, literally the last sentence you spoke I didn't quite understand that, sorry. On the in-school versus non-school.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: I think you had just said that the problem is beyond schools.

Governor Phil Murphy: Outside, yeah.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: And that within the schools it's okay, the system is working. I had thought that you said it would take a little time for school data to show up.

Governor Phil Murphy: The long-term care bills that I'll be signing, and Matt Platkin has joined us so he may want to weigh in, they will have both immediate and long-term impact. It's a combination. So one is we're going to form an emergency operations center, kind of ripped off from the OEM model that is under Pat's leadership, specific to long-term care.

Secondly, establishing a taskforce that's going to be real and have teeth that will look at long-term care quality and safety issues; that will be longer term by definition.

The third one is minimum wage increase and direct care ratio requirement. And so we're going to raise the minimum wage to \$3 above the state minimum wage for anybody working in those facilities. And the direct care ratio, if you think about it this way, in layman's terms, is how much are you putting at the point of attack with your patients, your residents, versus how much is going to overhead and other items? So we're going to require a certain commitment to that.

And then lastly, the fourth bill is a reimbursement rate increase in an appropriation, recognizing that minimum wage is going to cost these facilities more money, the direct care ratio requirement will cost them more money. Those will be with relatively quick effect, I believe, Matt, right? So I'd say of the four, Dustin, three of them have very short-term impact, and the fourth one is a longer-term look at the safety and quality issues in the industry.

There will be a full accounting. I continue to look every single day, the first numbers when I get the backup I look at are 62, 81, 3, which are the numbers of fatalities. in Menlo Park, Paramus and Vineland. Thank God those numbers have been flat for now I think months, and there will be a full accounting. I don't blame folks for being upset for one second. We have complete sympathy and we will make sure that whatever has happened there in those three homes – again, Vineland had three losses of life, it was still three too many, but that was a very different reality than Menlo Park and Paramus and the other long-term care facilities that we don't run around the state, of which there are many, many hundreds. We need to make sure we hold the mirror up to them and to ourselves.

So what I meant, yeah, it is absolutely, I think fair to say, Judy and Tina, too early to have a complete full accounting. What I meant, Dustin, the system is working when a school finds a case, they're following the protocol. I can't say definitively, because as I say, always as we sit here at this moment, we have no evidence of in-school transmission but I will say there's a couple of situations that are still being tracked down. And obviously, if we determined that there is any, you'll be the first to hear from us. But the system is working in the sense of if there's a case, it's being traced, tracked, obviously a bright line between is it an in-school transmission versus something that happened outside of school and someone brought it into school?

It's the latter category that's been the overwhelming reality so far in the school year. As I say, Judy, Tina and team are tracking down a couple of situations that we just want to make sure we understand. But I think overwhelmingly, the steps that are being taken are exactly the right ones when cases pop up. Again, please, don't be top of each other without face coverings, especially indoors. That's the big source right now of our challenge. And more on all of that as we know throughout the course of the week, as always. Brent, good afternoon.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon. Were you involved with the Big 10's decision to begin the football season next month at all? Multiple Big 10 campuses are hotspots. Are you comfortable with teams from those places coming to New Jersey to play contact sports? Are you comfortable with the football teams having daily rapid testing when regular students paying tuition don't get that?

The stimulus package Congressman Gottheimer released yesterday restricted state and local aid due to documented COVID expenses and documented revenue shortfalls. Can you support those restrictions on the aid? Do you think putting such limits on aid could be a compromise to break the deadlock on a stimulus bill and address Republican charges that this is a Blue State bailout? Then I have one more, then Matt Friedman has a question.

Given the allegations the Head of the Postal Service has made, it has been harder to deliver mail-in ballots in time, do you think this mailer that you referenced was sent to further confuse voters about mail-in ballots?

And then from Politico's Matt Friedman, a bill to eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for mostly nonviolent drug and property crimes was amended late last month to also eliminate mandatory minimums for official misconduct. The bill's original intention was to reduce incarceration racial disparities. Do you agree with that change? Would you sign the bill with that change if it makes it to your desk?

Governor Phil Murphy: The only involvement I had in the Big 10 decision was that Pat and I got a deal that we would be able to start at tight end and wide receiver, respectively. No, no involvement other than I want to give Rutgers a huge shout out. I had a long conversation, I guess on Sunday afternoon, with Dr. Jonathan Holloway, its new president who's off to a great start. I had no involvement in that but we had a really good conversation. I also want to give a huge shout out to Rutgers for the statement that they put out, which I think gets to your second question, Brent. Anyone who loves sports doesn't want to see this happen, right? We want to see football, I want to see Rutgers because I think they've got an incredibly exciting program at the moment. I can't say enough good things about that, but it has to be done safely, it has to be done right. I thought the statement Rutgers put out earlier today was really good in that respect. I think we're going to look at our executive orders to make sure that we don't need to tweak it to allow them to be able to both receive traveling teams or to make trips themselves.

It's got to be done safely. I mean, they said it better than I can. Who doesn't want to get back to seeing football? Count me at the top of that list, at the head of that list, but it's got to be done safely. They reserve the right to address that in whatever way they need to. Again, if there's anything we need to do to make sure we line up with the proposals, we will do that. We're already in touch with them, not just with President Holloway, but with the team there to make sure we understand in as much detail as possible, what this actually looks like.

We've said this before, they've had some positives in their athletic program, based on everything they've seen and that we've seen alongside them. It did not appear to come from any athletic activity, it came from non-athletic activity.

I don't think you have a choice on the testing protocol, if we're going to do this. That's what you're seeing in other sports. You know, the more publicized examples are the professional teams, but I don't think there's any way around that.

Before I move off of that, Matt, anything you want to add to any of that? Okay. I haven't read the specific proposals from the problem solvers. Josh gave me a heads up, which I appreciate. I think he does great work, that it was coming and sent a copy to our team which we're reviewing. I know we need upwards of \$20 billion of direct state and local between now and the end of the calendar year 2021. The challenges that we've had with the early rounds of coronavirus funds, CARES Act money, were in fact restrictions or methodologies on how that money could be spent. That has had the effect of hamstringing, in some cases, holding off when people say hey, you haven't spent the money you've already got? Well, there's a reason for that. Either we have spent it or we've already earmarked it and it's in the process of being drawn down. Or for a long time, the challenge has been, we have not had the guidance that we need to allow us to spend that.

So we're all for accountability and transparency. I think we were the first state in America to set up an Office of Transparency and Accountability on federal money, so I'm proud of that. We will make sure everybody knows where every penny was spent. But the more restrictions we have on it, the less impactful or least impactful the money is, without getting into the specifics. Again, I want to give him a huge shout out for his leadership. But again, we need wide latitude. Anything on that you'd add?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: That's exactly right. And we've taken a look at the plan. Obviously, there's no legislative text yet to be able to tell what some of those terms mean. But in broad strokes, I think what the plan is trying to do is solve problems that we've had with the last package, both by giving more money, some of which will go towards revenue shortfalls, some of which is expenses. And to the Governor's point, if you're looking at an expense approach, the devil is in the details. When they said remote learning wasn't a COVID expense, it was tough to justify that under the past program. If the new program did something more flexible, I think it's something we could potentially work on.

Governor Phil Murphy: Real quick, I have no evidence that the US Postal Service did that deliberately to confuse people, I certainly hope they did not. And if it ever comes out that they did, shame on them, but I've got no evidence unless you've got any evidence or Jared or Pat.

The last question came from Matt. Listen, I was honored in the first days of our administration to actually seat the Criminal Sentencing and Disposition Commission, which, and Mahen will correct me if I'm wrong here, had been sitting there waiting to be seated for eight years. The prior administration never populated the Commission. The co-chairs were two superstars. Deborah Poritz is the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and Jiles Ship, President of NOBLE, a national organization of Black law enforcement. Extraordinary commission. They met for plus or minus almost two years. They came up with a, I think, really compelling set of recommendations. Legislative leaders joined me when their Commission report came out. And again, this is a little bit like the Manatt Report, Judy. There was a list of stuff that we could do on our own through executive action, and there was a list of stuff that we needed, Pat, to work with our Legislative partners. I'm very laudatory and proud of the work that our Legislative partners have done.

Again, this is largely addressing minimum mandatory sentences for nonviolent crimes and some juvenile justice elements as well. I think, Pat, one of the important parts of this was it was roundly supported by county prosecutors, law enforcement, the Commission itself, Legislative, certainly our offices. Let me say unequivocally, official misconduct was not on the list. I just want to say as clearly as I can, I do not support official misconduct being roped into this legislation. Thank you. Please, sir. Good afternoon.

Reporter: It seems that more of the deaths and the individuals who've lost their lives that you highlight every day have happened more recently. Viewers would like to know, what do we know about these people? How they may have contracted the disease, their age range? Is there any correlation between their behavior and them getting severely ill? Were they frontline personnel or just everyday citizens? And in that same vein, what do we know along these lines about the people who are currently being hospitalized?

Governor Phil Murphy: Currently hospitalized? I will just make a comment and then Judy, you may want to come in with Tina behind me. The ones who I memorialize every day are a mix, and it usually takes a while for folks – as you can imagine, you're mourning the loss of a loved one, to get remotely back on your feet, to find

some amount of courage to have those conversations on their side. They are across the spectrum of the six months. Some of them go way back and we've wanted to memorialize them but the family hasn't felt up to it, whatever the reason may be.

I assume what you mean is more the daily reference we make to folks who have died in the hospital. I know, Judy, you have made, at least on the COVID confirmed, you have historically always noted how many were long-term care. I think you mentioned either in this press conference or earlier in our call, three of the nine today were from long-term care associated, which could be a staff member, right? It could be someone, most likely a resident. Any other color from you or Tina on the group that's in the hospital? It's about 50-50, as we've said pretty much every day, Judy, between confirmed and PUI, persons under investigation. But beyond that, any more color you've got?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: I keep reminding myself that generally we average 350 to 400 patients that are half COVID positive, half persons under investigation, and then you look at those that are discharged and the numbers are a lot less because many of the PUIs do not turn out to be COVID positive, but that's amongst 71 acute care hospitals. So when you break it down, the census in each hospital is quite low as compared to March, April and May and going into June where it was quite high, in the thousands. I remember at our height, it was 8,300.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, every loss of life is a tragedy and the families that are living it, but as you point out, when you've got 10 or 12 fatalities across a system of 71 hospitals, right? So you've got one, sort of on average, one every six hospitals is losing somebody if you're losing folks at that rate. We still have, and this is the cumulative number, sir so this is not what we report today. We still have, thank God, only three people under the age of 18, notwithstanding the concerning data that Judy referred to earlier, who have lost their life, and all three of them were under the age of four and had significant comorbidities. The folks that are 65 years and older remains just about where it's been, 79.3% of our fatalities are in that range. Thank you. Have you got anything, sir? Alex, we'll go to you and then down to Dave.

Alex Napoliello, NJ.com: Good afternoon, Governor. First for Colonel Callahan, I'd like to ask you about the long-term care emergency operations center. Is it going to be located in the ROIC and will your troopers be providing any assistance to help the Department of Health set that up?

For Commissioner Persichilli, I know that these bills being signed today are going to be to sort of alleviate the pressure on long-term care facilities. Do you feel there's more than needs to be done? If so, what? And do you feel that for your department, it's a hindrance that you're very often relying on attestations and essentially taking the word of hundreds of different facilities across the state that they're doing the right thing, putting together plans, putting together PPE?

For you, Governor, I have one question from News 12's Walt Kane. The Department of Military and Veteran Services says they fully support the three CEOs at the three veterans memorial homes across the state. I'd like to know if you agree.

And just a question from me, a more general question, if you could give us an update on the Attorney General's investigation into long-term care facilities. You yourself have said before that you believe there were some bad actors but as far as we can tell, no one's been held accountable. Five months ago bodies were discovered in a shed at the Andover subacute. You said you were outraged by that? Why is your administration waiting to hold these facilities accountable?

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't know that we have an answer as to where the operations center is going to be located. Judy has the answer. I don't have the answer. I should say I don't, the Royal "we" does not have it, but Judy does.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We have already set up the Emergency Operations Center, in the Emergency Operations Center at the Department of Health, which was established a number of years ago, I think under Commissioner Lacy, to be prepared for a pandemic or something like this. They've already met. They have representatives across the spectrum. The Department of Human Services has a seat. The Ombudsperson has a seat. I can't recall the rest of the participation. It is headed up by Dr. Adinaro, who is our Deputy Commissioner of Public Health and an emergency room physician. We've met a couple of times.

Governor Phil Murphy: I was actually, Judy, before you answer the second question, I was actually in my mind's eye thinking about the bridge between the Operations Center and OEM and I think that's going to be virtual, in the sense that you all are talking morning, noon and night and that things like PPE, for instance, into long-term care facilities.

More to be done in long-term care, and how about the question on relying on attestation, which has been a historical reality?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We're in the process of setting up a long-term care division within the Department of Health, which is actually separate from the Licensing, Regulation and Enforcement Division, purposefully. The job descriptions are written. There'll be a part-time medical director, subject matter experts in long-term care quality and resiliency. It will be a consulting arm to help the long-term care facilities, particularly with infection prevention. It will also be responsible for education and training.

On the enforcement side, that's where the attestations will be reviewed. It is a daunting task because there's over, when you put it all together, over 600 facilities, but the team is ready to do that. They're prepared to do that and prepared, from a survey and complaint follow-up process, to always check the attestations when they enter a facility. They'll be checking what the owner and the management is saying they're doing to make sure they're doing it. We're working as fast as we can.

Governor Phil Murphy: One other thing, the four bills we're going to sign are examples of this. They're not the only examples. We're establishing an ops center, we're raising minimum wage, we're going to be very clear about funding that goes to the resident patients versus overhead. The industry then has to execute on that. So this is, we're establishing a baseline and then we need execution on top of that. I have nothing else to add on the veterans homes, other than we're reviewing them and taking them very seriously. I did not see the statement but I'm going to withhold any comment on that.

I would say the same thing, Matt, for the Attorney General. I'm still outraged by that incident that happened around Easter, completely unacceptable, but I'm not going to comment on any activities that the Attorney General has ongoing. Anything you want to add or are you good with that? Okay. Thank you for those. Dave, nice to have you back. Good afternoon.

David Levinsky, Burlington County Times: Thank you, Governor. Nice to be back. Let's see here. We do have some in-person school instruction taking place, you recently reopened with limited capacity dining and movie theaters. But we keep hearing every once in a while about these knucklehead parties and gatherings, you know, whether it's at somebody's swimming pool or this one was down the shore. Do you believe this is the biggest threat now to New Jersey in terms of a possible COVID spike coming? Perhaps you and the Commissioner who needs no introduction could weigh in on that, because it certainly seems like, for some reason, what's the disconnect here with these kids? I mean, I understand their brains are not fully functional until they're 22 or 23, but this just seems peculiar that this kind of behavior is taking place. Has there been any consideration to try to encourage, you know, you have "just say no to drugs" groups at schools, maybe "just say no to knucklehead parties" at schools? Could that work?

And then, Governor, as you're well aware, a federal judge in Pennsylvania recently struck down their Governor's pandemic restrictions. What is your reaction to the ruling by this federal judge who I understand was appointed by the President? And is there a concern that this might happen here in New Jersey? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I had a friend today who said, by the way, that she had evidence of people who had been in hotspot states returning to New Jersey and not doing the right thing. I'm sure some of that's going on. But I don't think we've seen any egregious breakouts or hotspots as a result of that. Not that we're necessarily going to know in every case. A lot of balls in the air. The question is, is that the biggest threat? I mean, I'm putting aside whether or not the virus itself, as we've said, it ebbs and flows, it undulates. There well could be a second wave, so that's the big 800-pound gorilla, as they say, when you answer a question like that.

It's certainly one of them because Pat is on this, literally living this every day. We just don't have evidence of people doing the wrong thing, given the openings that we have supported. So we're not hearing bad behavior in gyms or in indoor restaurants, unless I'm mistaken here, or indoor amusement or movie theaters, we're just not hearing it. Given the volume of kids in school, 1.4 million plus community colleges, colleges, universities,

we're clearly going to have, here or there and we've seen that already as I said, when I mentioned as Dustin asked the question earlier, is the system working? It's working in what I mean in the sense that we're back to school. When a local district or local health authority sees a case, they're doing exactly what you'd want them to do.

I think the parties are probably, I mean, Judy, what's your thought? Tina? I think they're at or near the top of the list. It's dominated our discussion today. Now, that was one party. And by the way, as we go into late September, October, there won't be as many pool parties, we know that much. It feels to me like that's at or near the top of the list right now. And again, I'm exempting from that, as I know Tina and Judy would want me to say, it's putting aside with the virus does on its own in terms of a second wave etc.

I only saw the headlines, the general headlines around the federal judge's ruling on Pennsylvania. I would just say, and Matt can add color to this. First of all, Pennsylvania is a different reality than New Jersey, we have our own constitution and our own rules of the road. We wouldn't be putting these executive orders out as we do without having thought deeply about their viability and their efficacy and I feel completely comfortable as I sit here today that what we have done will withstand the test of time, will withstand legal challenges, etc. And so far, that has been the case. Matt, anything you want to add to that?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: Yeah, I would just say we've certainly reviewed the decision from the Western District of Pennsylvania. I would note that we've had more than two dozen challenges to various orders issued by the Governor and the Commissioner of Health in state and federal court in New Jersey. We haven't had a single one of those orders struck down. And in fact, orders around the country have been challenged and upheld, including all the way up to the Supreme Court. While we certainly respect the decision, the Western District doesn't control the State of New Jersey and we will continue to enforce the Governor's orders and defend them vigorously, and the Attorney General has done just that to date.

Governor Phil Murphy: I want to give Matt and his team a lot of credit here, in the sense of these are written as tightly and constructed as tightly with enormous amount of input. I mean, a lot of these are executive orders by me. Some of them are Pat on his own, or Pat and I together, many of them are Judy and Department of Health, and each one of these we take very, very seriously.

So with that, I'm going to mask up. Again, thanks to everybody, Judy and Tina, as always. Thank you, Pat. Likewise, Jared, the APB worked, we found you. That was my bad, I should have known where you were. Matt, Mahen, again, we'll be back tomorrow virtual. I'll be around the state, really more in the southern part of the state tomorrow. And then Friday, unless you hear otherwise, at one o'clock. And again, thanks to everybody for everything you've done. Again, kind of a theme today that rises above others is when you're on your own, when Pat or his colleagues in law enforcement are not going to be in your basement, when Judy is not going to be there, or her team members there checking your temperature, or other vital signs, when you're on your own and as they say, when the lights are not on and nobody's looking, you've got to do the right thing then as well. I think if we could crack the back of that reality, I think we would have an even better situation right now than we have. But we've gotten to where we are today because overwhelmingly you all are doing the right thing. We thank you for that and we just need you to keep it up. God bless you. Thank you.

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