

Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: July 12th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Murphy Holds COVID-19 Briefing



**Governor Phil Murphy:** Good afternoon, everyone. With me to my right is a woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, another familiar face, the state's epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan. To my far right is another guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan, and to my immediate left, very happy to welcome back Secretary of Higher Education Dr. Brian Bridges. Brian is here to speak to the latest investments his office is making in releasing the next round of pandemic relief funds for our institutions of higher education. I will speak to them in general terms in a minute, and Brian will fill in the details. Before we get to that, a couple of announcements. First of all, I have signed an executive order lowering flags statewide tomorrow Tuesday in honor of this giant, Gwendolyn Faison, the former mayor of Camden who passed away this weekend at the age of 96. She was first city's chief executive for ten years but was a community force for many, many more. As a long-time member of the 10th Street Baptist Church and on the city council where she served for 17 years before rising to the mayor's office, she provided stability and civility to city hall during a time of great upheaval, and as the first woman to serve as Camden's mayor, she was a trailblazer as well. She served with honor and dignity, and she will be missed.

Next up, I'm pleased to announce that today – Judy, if I've got this right, the Department of Health is providing you access to your COVID vaccination records through the secure and free smartphone app Docket. The Docket app is available through both the Apple and Google Play app stores. To be absolutely clear, this is not a passport. Docket is intended to solely give residents easy access to their COVID vaccination record, especially if their vaccination card has been damaged or lost, and while the information available through Docket is currently limited to your COVID vaccination record, it will be broadened to provide you with your entire record from the New Jersey Immunization Information System, and Judy will speak to this in greater detail in a couple minutes.

Now back to Brian, to our colleges and universities. Today we are announcing nearly \$30 million in additional federal supports to help our higher education sector weather the impacts of COVID on its core missions. The bulk of this funding, about 28.5 million, is headed out to nearly three dozen colleges and universities in support of the office's

Opportunity Meets Innovation challenge, which is a competitive grant program. Through this program, institutions will use their grant awards to implement best administrative practices to college-wide reforms with an eye to ensuring their own long-term resiliency against future challenges. More importantly, these reforms and practices will be focused on those students who were most impacted by COVID and who would also be at greatest risk in a future emergency, students from historically under-representative communities, students from low-income households, and working-age adults looking to get back to school for new skills to change careers.

We're also distributing more than \$1 million in funding to 11 schools to support their efforts to address food insecurity and hunger among their students. This is being done through our implementation of our Hunger Free Campus Act, which I signed into law two years ago. We know that there are numerous students across our state whose studies are made harder because they do not have the means for stable and nutritious meals, and I think Brian would agree with me this is a hugely under-reported and hugely under-focused on reality in the overall food insecurity landscape. These funds will be leveraged by receiving colleges and universities to create sustainable solutions and strategic partnerships to address their on-campus food needs and raise awareness of available campus services among students who may need a helping hand. As we move forward and eventually fully out, please God, from under the cloud of the pandemic, we must ensure that every student has the tools they will need for success in the workforce of tomorrow. This is where our state's colleges and universities have long excelled, and we are proud to partner with them to ensure their continued ability to meet the needs of their students and educational communities. Again, I want to thank the Secretary of Higher Education, the guy to my left, Dr. Brian Bridges and his team for their work, and we're going to hear from him in a couple of minutes.

Now let's turn our attention to today's numbers. Given the now weekly nature of our meetings going forward, we will be providing our vaccination, new COVID case, and confirmed death numbers with an added look-back to our prior meeting, so today we're providing the tool – the totals, rather, for the past four days, Thursday through Sunday, in addition to today, and then next Monday, we'll have an entire week's worth of data. We will still provide online updates every day on our dashboard and through our social media channels. First, looking at our vaccination progress, we are today reporting a total of 5,113,694 individuals who live, work, or study in New Jersey who are now fully vaccinated. This is an increase of 46,765 since we last met on Wednesday. You can see here the one-day new case numbers for today and from Thursday through today. We have added a total of 1,438 new positive PCR and 518 presumed positive antigen test results. The rate of transmission is currently .95. The positivity rate for all PCR tests from last Thursday alone was 1.7%, and by the way, the positivity tests – for all tests, rather, from Sunday July 4th through Thursday was also 1.7%. Since last Thursday, we have now confirmed an additional with the heaviest of hearts 20 deaths with four of those being reported and confirmed today.

Looking into our healthcare systems, we have reports from 67 of our 71 hospitals, an unusually low hit rate today. We had some data issues coming in from those hospitals. They show 249 COVID-positive persons being treated alongside 63 persons under investigation, and you can see our ICU and ventilator counts as well as the latest discharge and admission information and the in-hospital deaths for the past 24 hours, which again, are not confirmed. It cannot be understated that these numbers continue to be driven by the unvaccinated. As Judy detailed last Wednesday, the Delta variant, which is now – which is more highly contagious and more dangerous regardless of age group is now the predominant strain of the coronavirus. All three – and this is important, folks. Listen up. All three of the vaccines we have in our toolbox, Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, are proving themselves highly effective against the Delta and other variants, especially in protecting folks from an illness that would require hospitalization and please God from death. The vaccines are widely available. They are absolutely free. We urge you to go out and get your vaccine to protect yourself, your family, and your community.

By the way, it is because of the vaccine that businesses like this one Tessara in Mercer County's Hamilton Township, right down the street, have been able to reopen to customers and to bring back their employees. For so much of the pandemic, Tessara's owner, that guy on the right, Adnan Bektas, had to keep the doors of his establishment closed, providing only meals that could be enjoyed in an outdoor setting or back at home. Their banquet hall, which could cater to weddings and other celebrations had to remain empty. Thanks to the emergency grant programs offered through the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, Adnan, with whom I spoke last Wednesday – by the way, Adnan came to New Jersey from Turkey. He was able to keep his business viable.

By the way, check him out. 812 Route 33 in Hamilton. You know that neighborhood, Judy, very well. 813 Route 33 in Hamilton, but what really gave him his boost was the fact that so many people had gotten vaccinated that he could begin to safely and responsibly welcome back his customers, his employees, and all of their families. If you want a selfless reason to get vaccinated, do it for the small businesses up and down the state, where you go and where the majority of New Jerseyans work, businesses just like Tessara. When our community is healthy, our economy is healthy and vice versa. The words in front on this table have real meaning. Public health creates economic health. Get vaccinated and help us continue to restore our state's economy to full health while you get the added protection against COVID that is needed to end this pandemic once and for all.

Sadly, we will always have to remember that there are more than 26,000 New Jerseyans who won't be with us for this bright future. We'll honor three more of them now, and if you need another reason to get vaccinated, listen to their stories and then look at your family and try to imagine their life if you are lost to COVID or vice versa. Just three weeks ago on June 18th, 92-year-old Maria Keehn of Shrewsbury lost her long and heroic battle against the virus. That is a great picture. She was born on the 4th of July, not surprisingly, the proud daughter of Italian immigrants. Her father Vincenzo returned to his native soil to aid the allied effort in World War II, sustaining mortal wounds at the battle of Matera. While she never again saw her father, Maria knew he died a hero who earned multiple commendations from the Italian government, but her life was always spent in Monmouth County and mostly in Asbury Park, Neptune, and Sea Bright where she was an active participant in the community's civic life as her husband Robert served on the Borough Council.

She also worked at the local supermarkets for 25 years, becoming a familiar face to multiple generations. Maria was predeceased by Robert, by her companion later in life as well, Frank, and by six of her seven siblings. Her sister Vincenza survives her, as do her sons Robert and Bruce, and Bruce's wife Lisa. I had the great honor of speaking with Bruce about his mom last Wednesday. She also leaves behind her six grandchildren, Robert, Kerri, Staci, Bruce, Evelyn, and Bryan and their families, including her ten great grandchildren, Lauren, Ryan, Alexis, Bruce III, Salvatore, Domenica, Annmarie, Abigail, James, and Riley. May God bless her memory and watch over her family.

Next today we'll stay in Monmouth County and also recall Manalapan's Margaret "Peggy" Moore. She passed just two days before Christmas. She was another lifelong shore area resident, a graduate of Freehold Regional High School where she was behind the scenes of the Lakewood Shoprite for more than 30 years, serving as the supermarket's bookkeeper. She loved her job and held close the many lifelong friendships she made with the people she worked alongside, but Peggy's true love was her family. She took special pride in raising her four daughters, and after her retirement in 2014, her two grandkids. Her surviving family notes that she always had a huge smile on her face when the kids were around. She left behind her four daughters, Monica, Veronica, Stephanie, and Jennifer – and I had the great honor of speaking with Stephanie last Wednesday – and their spouses, along with her two beloved grandchildren, Isabella and Dominic, and I believe that's young Isabella in the photo with her. She is further survived by her brother William, her sister Joan, along with numerous other relatives and dear friends. May God also bless and watch over Margaret's memory and her family and look after all who she left behind.

Finally today, we will remember Mahwah's Anna Brignola. We lost her on January 23rd, and she was just 54 years old. Anna was a daughter of Hudson County, born and raised in West New York. At a young age, she was diagnosed with a cognitive disability but never let it define her, and as her family will remember, she taught them more about life and what it means to be loved than anyone could've ever done. Anna had three favorite hobbies: painting, music, and the New York Mets. Thank God she didn't see what happened yesterday with the Pirates. One can only imagine her smile looking down with the season, in fact, all kidding aside, that the Mets are putting together. She left to remember her gentle nature her mother Emelia who by the way had COVID bad, hospitalized, please keep her – she's better, but keep her in your prayers – her sisters, Theresa and Mary – and by the way Theresa, I had the great honor of speaking to last week or with. She's an educator in North Bergen. She had COVID bad – again, her sister Theresa and Mary, her brother Daniel. She also leaves her three cherished nieces, Carissa, Alexa, and Liana, her nephew Steffen, and her great-niece Emma, a particularly favorite name of ours. Her sister Teresa said so many nice and beautiful things about her, but the family was clobbered by COVID, including some serious cases, and as I mentioned, the mom was in the hospital. Keep them all in your prayers. We pray that God also blesses Anna, and we thank her for so wonderfully living our great New Jersey values.

Let's end today on an uplifting note. Yesterday, New Jersey's own Samir Banerjee from Basking Ridge won the boy's singles title at Wimbledon. Samir is 17 years old and was playing in just his second Grand Slam event or tournament. He entered Wimbledon as an unseated competitor despite being the number 19 ranked junior player in the world, and took the title in a straight set 7-5, 6-3 victory. He is a product of Ridge High, and this fall Samir will be heading to Columbia University where in addition to his studies he'll also play tennis. Something tells me he won't have to worry about being unseated in his future matches, so to you, Samir, congratulations. What a huge victory and what a great badge of honor. A quick final point that Samir's tennis idol is none other than Novak Djokovic who won the men's title yesterday for his 20th Grand Slam victory. That's not a bad guy to look up to if you're in the line of business for tennis. That'll wrap things up for me. Please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health – oh, sorry. Forgive me. I'm going to Brian. Brian kind of doesn't need an introduction either. Please help us welcome the Secretary of Higher Education, Dr. Brian Bridges. Brian?

**Secretary of Higher Education Brian Bridges:** Thank you, Governor. I appreciate the opportunity to be with you, Health Commissioner Persichilli, and Colonel Callahan this afternoon. New Jersey's colleges and universities continue rising to meet the ever-growing challenges of the past year, and I've been impressed by not only how those institutions have adapted but also how our students have persevered in their pursuit of their post-secondary degrees. Over the past few months, I've met students who are excelling despite the obstacles before them, and we know that COVID-19 has

exacerbated preexisting racial, equity gaps in access to higher education and degree completion. We owe it to students most negatively impacted, in particular low income, minority, and under-served students to align funding with our student-centric mission to ensure that all students are supported.

To address the core priorities for our state plan for higher education and address the pandemic's impacts, today we're announcing the awardees of nearly \$30 million in federal funding. We dedicated a majority, 28.5 million, of this second round of Governor's Emergency Education Relief Funding, to establish a competitive grant process called the Opportunity Meets Innovation Challenge to implement vetted best practices that increase college completion and address barriers to student success. More than 30 of our institutions across the state will receive funding. Given that barriers to student success are often multifaceted, interconnected, and require sustainable solutions, funding will help institutions develop system-wide reforms that pave the way for long-term progress in achieving our goals. Institutions selected from a series of grant options that reflect the five core priorities of the state plan, which include expanding opportunities for students to gain early college exposure, improving college affordability, fostering student success, promoting safe and inclusive learning environments, and cultivating research, innovation, and talent.

In implementing these strategies, institutions will focus on the needs of students who are historically disadvantaged through activities such as establishing partnerships with childcare centers for student parents, implementing free of cost bridge programs for first-generation and Pell-eligible students, and expanding student mental health services. An additional \$1 million in funding will support the goals of the Hunger Free Campus Act, a bill put forth by our legislative partners that the Governor signed into law two years ago to establish a grant program and address food insecurity among students enrolled at public institutions, and as the governor said, this is often an under-reported but pervasive problem that is gaining more attention in colleges and universities across country. Many of our institutions have made tremendous strides in addressing food insecurity on campuses – on our campuses.

Nineteen of our institutions received the Hunger Free Campus designation and 11 of those will receive grant funding, which can be used to address student hunger, leverage more sustainable solutions to address basic food needs on campuses, raise awareness of currently offered campus services, and continue building strategic partnerships at the local, state, and national level to address food insecurity among students. This second round of gear funding is addition to the more than 2 billion – that's billion with a B – in federal funding made available to New Jersey's higher education sector to help alleviate the challenges brought on by the pandemic. Through this funding coupled with our historic public investments made in higher education through our fiscal year '22 budget, we remain committed to ensuring students have equitable, affordable access to quality post-secondary education now and in the future.

Governor, I want to thank you, and I've heard from several presidents already this morning after we sent out initial notices for your commitment to ensuring that New Jersey's students are given transformative opportunities and support to succeed during this unprecedented time. I see back to you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Brian, thank you. Keep up the great work to you and the team, just really, really impressive. I don't know that any other state in America is deploying this money in the way we are, so hats off to you.

I jumped the gun but here we go. Please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. As the Governor mentioned, in an effort to expand consumer access to immunization records, the Department is launching the NJ Docket app. Individuals who were vaccinated in the state and have an email or phone number on file with the New Jersey Immunization Information System known as NJIIS can access their COVID-19 vaccination record using the app. The app will be helpful to those who perhaps have lost their vaccination card or it got damaged or want quick access to their record. Docket will improve the ease and turnaround time for those who want a copy of their COVID-19 immunization history.

The previous process, as some of you know, involve submitting a request form and supportive documentation to NJIIS and the staff mailing out the record, which can take several days. The app currently only displays COVID-19 vaccination details. However, future plans include expanding access for other full immunization histories. If a resident received COVID-19 vaccine out of state, their records may not be available in NJIIS. However, the Department is working to obtain records for New Jersey residents vaccinated in other states.

Docket is a CDC-approved application currently used in Utah and planned for rollout in additional states. The app adheres to federal and state standards for data security and privacy. Providing this record digitally as is done with other health records simplifies the access for our consumers. The Free New Jersey Consumer Access Docket app is available in the App Store or on Google Play in English and Spanish.

If you are unvaccinated, please make a plan to get vaccinated. People who are not vaccinated remain at risk. Virtually all COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths are among those who are unvaccinated. The Delta variant, a highly transmissible variant, is circulating in our state and is the fastest-growing variant overtaking the Alpha variant as the most dominant variant. We do know that the available vaccines are effective against the Delta variant, preventing serious disease and hospitalization. We encourage residents who have not yet been vaccinated to get vaccinated as soon as possible to protect themselves, their children, other loved ones, and their community. There's plenty of availability and locations to get vaccinated. There are over 1500 community-based sites and pop-up vaccination sites in the state where individuals can receive the vaccination. Please visit [covid19.nj.gov/finder](https://covid19.nj.gov/finder) for the locations.

We continue to focus on increasing vaccinations in communities where we see lower rates. We have county ambassadors working with elected officials, local public health and community groups to increase rates in municipalities right now in 11 counties: Bergen, Burlington, Camden, Essex, Hudson, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Passaic, and Union. The collaborations are helping to increase rates and providing – it provides also insight into these communities. For example, in New Brunswick, working with leaders in the city and the mayor and in collaboration with our data team, we've determined that their coverage is actually over 70% when you give consideration to the number of students living off-campus in New Brunswick who must get vaccinated when they return to Rutgers. Collaboration with local community leaders is key to improving our vaccination rates.

In other vaccine news, Pfizer announced last week that they are seeking authorization for a third dose of vaccine. CDC and FDA said at this time that Americans who have been fully vaccinated may not need a booster dose. However, FDA, CDC, and the National Institutes of Health are engaged in a science-based rigorous process studying whether or when a booster is necessary. They will review all of the Pfizer data and in fact, they are meeting with Pfizer today to discuss this issue. We await further guidance from the federal government on any need for booster doses.

Moving onto my daily report, the Governor shared our hospitals' report of 312 hospitalizations of COVID-19 patients and PUIs, and that is with three actual hospitals not reporting over the weekend. Fortunately there are no new cases of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children, and there are no new cases in our vet homes or our psychiatric hospitals. The percent positivity as of July 8th is 1.7%; the northern part of the state 1.46; the central part of the state, 1.72; and I draw your attention to the southern part of the state, which is 2.5%.

That ends my report. Continue to stay safe. Let's get vaccinated to protect ourselves, our family, our friends, and enjoy a safe and healthy summer. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, thank you as always. I count 1479 open locations in the state and 29 closed locations for specific populations. That's to get vaccinated, so there are places all over the state and near each and every one of you. That's not by accident. I should've given a shout-out to Deputy Secretary of Higher Education Diana Gonzalez who's with us today. Diana, great to have you. Thank you for everything you do.

Pat, Task Force 1 is still in Florida with the grim work that they're doing at this collapsed building, God bless them. Any update you've got on them? It feels like we're – it feels like it's hankering for a lot of thunderstorms and a lot of rain. Any update on weather and any advice you got. Great to have you.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. Yes, Task Force 1 is still working down at the collapse in Florida. We probably expect there'd be mobilization orders. The teams that got there before them are being demobilized, so although we haven't seen that order from FEMA yet, I anticipate that by the end of the week.

With regards to weather, we have heat advisory in place through tomorrow in northwest Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester We expect to see a lot of rain tonight into tomorrow. There's flash flood watches in 11 of our 21 counties with upwards of 4 inches expected to fall in some spots in the northern counties, so certainly keeping an eye on that, Governor. I'll just – because our Secretary's here today, I'd just close with letting you know that we had policy academy directors from all over the country at Rutgers University this morning, Miami, Los Angeles, NYPD, Baltimore, some of our bigger cities discussing best practices as it relates to community engagement, deescalation, handling of mentally ill persons, and it's just a phenomenal group of men and women with a tremendous amount of experience It was a tremendous source of pride for us that they picked Rutgers University and the Center on Policing to have that two-day conference. I was honored to be there to welcome them to the great state of New Jersey.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** How big a crowd?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** Twenty-five different directors from around the country.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Is this something that moves around the country, or is this a one-and-done?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** This was actually the first time of its kind working with the Center on Policing from Rutgers and the Miller Institute. Former Attorney General John Farmer headed it up, and it was a special group of people, always trying to make sure that we leave it better than we found it and this next generation of men and women in law enforcement are the brightest and the best in serving our communities.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** You heard the expert here, but it seems to me that's the sort of stuff we can't do enough of.

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** Amen.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Comparing best practices, looking at ways that folks may not be thinking about. Thank you for that, a deep appreciation. This is our first week of the one gathering, so I want to see how this works for a few weeks. We've got Parimal Garg and Dan Brian are with us. They'll help us gauge whether or not this is the right level of frequency. My guess is we'll ebb and flow depending on what this virus looks like over the next several months. For instance, if the numbers keep going in the right direction, my guess is we'll stay at one a week on Mondays. We'll probably – Tina, I should ask Ed Lifshitz this. We'll probably, I would guess, Judy, would probably switch toward updating the probables on Mondays at some point over time. That would be my guess just because that's the day that we would be together. I could also imagine – please, God, this doesn't happen – if the virus takes a wrong turn, a bad turn, or even if it doesn't when we're doing things like getting back to school. My guess is we may turn the frequency back up again, but bear with us. Again, we'll be with you a week from today right here, 1 o'clock, and I'm sure we'll be moving around this week. If we have the opportunity to give COVID updates in that moving around, we will do so.

### Q&A Section

With that, we'll start here. Brent, good afternoon.

**Brent Johnson, NJ.com:** Good afternoon. If people do need to get the booster shot in the fall, does the state have a system to distribute that in terms of appointments and people getting it? You also said the Delta variant has become the prominent strain. Is that nationally or is it also true here in New Jersey and in what time period? The state dashboard currently shows the B-117 strain has 40% of the variant cases over the last four weeks, which would make it the largest. Has that changed? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Okay, I'll make two observations and then turn it over to the experts. I mentioned a couple minutes ago we have 1479 locations right now and 29 – those are open, 29 closed. The megasites are no longer up and running but just like the field medical stations, Pat, those megasites – I don't want to overstate the case but between state police, healthcare partners, National Guard, we can turn on a dime. I'm highly confident that we can – that we'll have the infrastructure in place and we are making deliberate decisions to make sure that we do. Again, I want to reiterate what Judy said. At least up until now, the CDC and FDA have said that they do not believe, at least as of this moment, the third one is needed, but they're meeting on it, as Judy mentioned, today.

I think we meant Delta's the dominant variant in the state. We know it is in the country, but any observations Judy or Tina have on either our ability to deliver the booster shot if that's what it comes to or the variant and Delta in particular.

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** CDS has had a long-standing vaccine program. Dr. Barbara Montana, who's worked for years, has taken this under consideration from day one and is working aggressively to make sure that we can move vaccines into primary care offices, FQHCs, where people have historically received their vaccines including pharmacies. As the Governor said, if we need to easily put up larger sites, we're ready to do that. The planning started months ago for when vaccine becomes ubiquitous and we need to deliver on a regular basis.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Tina, any observations about Delta?

**State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan:** Yeah, right now Delta variant is proportionately the highest proportion of variant that's circulating in the US as well as in New Jersey. We actually just updated our variant report and it should be up pretty soon. As of this report, Delta variant represents about 41% of the proportional variant. The other thing to note is that the proportions of variants in general will fluctuate over time. For example, remember when the pandemic first emerged last year? That variant doesn't exist anymore or virtually is not detectable. That's why it's really important for us to monitor that activity but most importantly, again, to keep these variants – new variants from emerging, we really have to get the vaccination coverage optimized.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Well said, thank you. Thank you, Brent.

Alex, good afternoon.

**Alex Zdan, News 12 New Jersey:** Good afternoon, Governor. Commissioner, on the Docket app, you said it was CDC-approved but it doesn't sound like it was developed by the CDC. Who developed it? How much is the state paying this entity to use the app? What third-party vendors, if any, will have access to people's personal information? For you,

Governor, you just said that you don't believe that the Docket app will be used as a vaccine passport. Isn't it inevitable that private businesses, third-parties, will use this as a vaccination passport? Do you believe that that should be made illegal, that people should not be able to turn others away who are unvaccinated using the state's app? I'd also like to ask you about masking in schools. The CDC has decreed that unvaccinated students must wear masks in schools. Isn't that contradictory or could be contradictory to a district that allows everyone to be unmasked? Are you going to change your guidance, or are you going to step in and change what the CDC has ordered for New Jersey schools? Lastly for the Colonel, I'm sure you've been briefed about the result of the Yasmine Uyar case that the Amber Alert went out for on Friday. Did the Amber Alert go out quickly enough? Are there – was there anything that could've been done to find that young lady more quickly before she was killed? Additionally, there are court records that show she obtained a final restraining order against the suspect nearly 18 months ago. Did the system, did the state, fail this young woman?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Let me start with the two questions in and around the Docket. I don't have the details on how much it costs or who developed it. Perhaps Judy does but if not, we'll get back to you on that. I'm where I've been on passports. I'm not hell no, but we continue to need to make more progress on the equity front, and progress is being made. There's no question. We've come a long way, but in particular in black and brown communities, we're not yet where we need to be. I continue to believe until we are – and we've not – and until we've given it everything we've got and that everyone has had a fair access to the vaccine, then while I'm open-minded, I don't think the timing is right.

On masking, we're where we are. We're still – I think Judy and team and the Department of Education are still digesting the CDC guidance. I'm happy to say that overwhelming what they came out with was very consistent with what – where we were a couple of weeks before them. We'll continue to monitor it like a hawk. As I've said before, unlike putting an HVAC system in, a mask decision you can – you have the ability – more time on the clock is realistic, and you can make that decision Sunday night for Monday morning. We're comfortable with where we are and by the way, remember, these from the state are recommendations. Any school district has the ability to tweak that based on their local circumstances. That's been an approach that's worked I think particularly well on the school front.

I mean, it was an awful, awful, unspeakable tragedy. I'll let Pat and/or Parimal speak to that. God bless that woman and thank God the little boy was saved. It just is a reminder of the scourge of domestic violence. Before we go to Pat, Judy, anything else you want to add on the Docket front or should we get back with any – we'll get back to you.

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** I'll have to get back on the cost, see if I can find it.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** We'll come back on who's developing and the cost. Dan, will you help me on that one? Pat, any observations on this awful tragedy?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** It was certainly a tragedy. I'm not sure, Alex, we could've done anything different or quicker. We follow those criteria as to putting out those Amber Alerts. Even though we knew the mother was missing and in danger, that really went out because of the toddler involved in this. When subjects change license plates and turn off their phones, it makes it very difficult for us to track them down, and that's why we enlist the help of the public. As with all cases like this, we will do a deep dive in connection with Ralway Police Department and see if we could've done anything different. From what I've been briefed on so far, I don't think we could've changed the outcome in this case.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** The Union County Prosecutor as well would be a part of that, right?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** That's correct.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thank you for that, Alex. Awful, awful tragedy. Sir? Good afternoon.

**Reporter:** Good afternoon. Sorry, one sec. For Commissioner Persichilli and Dr. Tan, what are you seeing in terms of respiratory viruses this summer? Are they higher than you'd expect and what could be responsible for the increase? Governor, more beach towns are putting in curfews and other restrictions to stop crowds of teenagers from gathering. Should the state rethink the directive issued by the Attorney General that calls for cops to issue warnings to juveniles instead of more severe consequences?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Is that it?

**Reporter:** That's it.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I'll give a quick thought and Pat may want to come in on the second one again. I'm going to go out on a limb here and say when we took off our masks on May 28th, I think we all knew that we were going to be getting back to a more normal respiratory illness reality. I think we talked about this last week. It's the likely reason why the PUIs have been the numbers that have been bouncing around the most because I assume a respiratory illness is presented and the default assumption over the past 16 months has been you've got COVID. In this case, we're in a different mode. I'll leave it – I'll take a break there. Tina, what's your reaction to any or all of that?

**State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan:** Yeah, I mean, definitely we're seeing an increase in respiratory viruses aside from SARS-CoV-2 circulating right now. To the Governor's point, when you minimize other precautions such as masking or social distancing – those are always concerns that you're going to see that emergence. Several weeks ago, the CDC had issued an alert of interseasonal increases in respiratory syncytial virus which is a virus that can cause pretty bad illnesses, particularly among younger individuals. What we found or what the National Surveillance has shown, this increase that has been predominantly hitting the South is – that they're seeing a lot of this activity right now that – probably these older toddlers, infants, they haven't really been exposed to this respiratory syncytial virus, RSV, last year, so they're potentially more at risk this year because they didn't get that exposure last year. We're also seeing increases in other respiratory viruses like parainfluenza, rhinovirus, so we'll continue to monitor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** You hate to say it but it makes sense, right? As you get back to normal, that's largely – when we say we're back to normal, that's largely people here. It's a really good thing, but we're also back to normal on respiratory illnesses.

**State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan:** If I can just add that we also want to remind healthcare providers that always be on the lookout for other respiratory viruses in addition to SARS-CoV-2 and that again, it's a reminder to individuals that if you have a respiratory illness and you test negative for COVID-19, still stay home when you're sick. You could have another respiratory virus, and we have to think about those younger individuals who are particularly – and older individuals who might be more susceptible to more severe illness from these respiratory viruses.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Amen. Pat, I'll make a observation or two and then you should jump in, and Parimal's welcome to add anything he's got. I would just reiterate I think there are a lot of reasons why folks are behaving the way they are coming out of a pandemic when you've been locked down, when you've been going to school remotely, when you've been working remotely. I'd throw on that hot as heck weather, which is always an ingredient. The shore is booming. There's a disconnect between the economy and the labor market; we've talked about that a fair amount. Public safety, we meet on this constantly. We do – Pat and colleagues, the Attorney General, county prosecutors, local chiefs and forces take preemptive actions on a regular basis and will continue to. I would just ask everybody – we understand you've been cooped up for 16 months; we get it. We know it's hot as heck outside. Please, behave responsibly. We just got to beg people. It's one thing to have fun, and who could blame you for wanting to have fun after what we've gone through, but do it responsibly. Pat, please

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** I would echo those remarks, too, Governor, and it's always – every day, it's striking a balance between that discretion that law enforcement has, enforcement, and making sure that people have a good time responsibly. I myself, I was down the shore, Jersey Shore, for the past four days. I saw nothing but responsible individuals both on the beaches and out on the waterways. Understanding that, we can all have a good time coming out of this pandemic, but let's just do it responsibly and keep our safety and well-being in mind. Thanks, Gov.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** You good, Parimal? Thank you. Let's go to Dave here, if that's okay. Dave, good afternoon.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** Hi, Governor. With all due respect, I don't think you answered the question that was just asked. Do you feel as the Mayor of Avalon does and his police chief that the laws that you backed that limit the power of police with regard to alcohol and marijuana are the reasons why these young people are going a little wacko? What's your reaction to this? You've said, Governor, that all options are on the table with regard to the Delta variant in terms of new infections ticking up. Excuse me. I don't believe I have the Delta variant, but I am half choking to death.

You've said that all options are on the table. Some people feel that if they have followed your guidance, gotten vaccinated, that basically they could get punished if social distancing, masking, capacity limit restrictions are put back in place. What's your reaction to this? Can you understand their concern about this because again, today we've heard a lot of pleas from different people asking everybody to please get vaccinated, and yet some people are still making the decision they're not going to get vaccinated. At what point does this become irresponsible behavior?

Finally, Wawa has, I've been told, taken down Plexiglas barriers along with many other businesses that are now completely back to normal. Yet the government offices continue to be closed. We've heard some departments are planning on reopening. I believe the –

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I assume you know Wawa's not part of the state government. I assume you know that.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** I did know that, yes.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Just checking.

**David Matthau, NJ 101.5:** In other words, we're seeing a complete coming back to normal situation and yet our state government offices are still closed. I know we talked about this a couple of weeks ago, but are we missing something here? I mean, why is it that state government always seems to lag behind the entire rest of the world in the private sector? Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Okay, thank you. I'll take the last one first. I don't know that I would agree with the premise of the question, and I think we've proven in an awful public health tragedy that government can be a very significant force for the good. I would just – I'm not – that's not about me. It's about the tens of thousand of people who work in our state government who have done extraordinary work. As we've said, we're going to get back to business, back to normal at some point. In the parts of state government where being physically present is the difference between delivering the service or not, we've already been doing that. Motor vehicles, obviously, is a good example of that. I don't have a date or an exact plan for you in terms of what that actually looks like, but that will happen.

Yeah, with all due respect, I'll say it back, I understand what the mayor and the police chief's comments were. We look at everything, constantly, and I think the factors are many. It's a little bit to me a different theme but it's a little bit to me why is there dislocation in the labor market? I'm not of the opinion there's any one reason for it. We want to make sure that when we think about what our strategy is that we consider all the options and look at all the contributing factors. I would say the same thing about people behaving irresponsibly. I'd also reiterate what Pat said. Overwhelmingly, people are doing the right thing. I think there are a lot of reasons why, and we'll continue to look at all of the elements.

I don't blame people for feeling that way who've been vaccinated. I don't blame them at all, and it's my hope that they will help me in whatever way they can influence the folks who are not yet vaccinated to get vaccinated because that's our one ticket to making sure we don't have to go back to the masking, social distancing, shutting stuff down. If they're frustrated, I don't blame them because there are some people – there are some legitimate reasons why folks – some folks are not being vaccinated in communities of color, particularly the African-American community. Our nation's history particularly as it relates to that community and vaccines is not pretty. It takes – and Brian is with me here. It takes an extra effort using role models, faith leaders, doctors, nurses, at the big, deep, robust information campaign to overcome that. That to me is a legitimate challenge. Somebody who has got – Judy and Tina, someone who has historical significant some form of comorbidity or allergic reality with vaccines who's lived it, who's got a legitimate issue with this – to me, that's a valid concern.

There's multiples of those populations of people who are listening to myths, listening to garbage, that are just not fact-based, and they need to be called out. This thing works and it's safe and they got to get vaccinated. For those folks who've done the right thing, it's like all the business proprietors when Pat was reading through for many, many months executive order violations. We were talking about the knuckleheads. We weren't talking about the 99.9% of the people who are doing the right thing, and this is another case of that. Frankly, I don't blame them.

With that, Nikita, good afternoon. We'll take us home here.

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** Good afternoon, Governor. I'm wondering whether New York City's recent experience with rank choice voting makes you more or less favorable towards the policy. Next, do you have any regrets about referring – or rather, your campaign referring to Ambassador Nikki Haley as a Trump lackey? Have you had any conversations with Amy Kennedy about a perspective rematch against Congressman Van Drew? Have you spoken with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi about the state's congressional redistricting?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I don't know that I've got – I'm not – as I approach your first question about rank choice voting, I don't come in like I would on things like minimum wage or in-person early voting or gun safety. I don't come in with a great passion. I don't look at it as fixing a big injustice in our voting reality. Has the New York experience changed that? I don't know that it has, honestly. I'm open-minded but it's not something I approach and say boy, I – this is a great passion like in-person early voting was a passion. Getting folks who are on probation or parole the right to vote again was a passion. This is not on that list.

Listen, the guy who made that comment is a close colleague of mine, and if you knew him well, you'd know that that's not what he meant, and people should know that. I appreciate the question, but this is a guy who has impeccable credentials, impeccable values, and I love the guy. That's all I'm going to say on that.

I speak to Amy a lot. I haven't spoken to her in the past number of weeks. I'll leave those conversations private, but that has not been a regular topic of discussion with her. I continue to think the world of her.

Lastly, we've spoken over time about the importance as a general matter, not necessarily the specifics of redistricting. The speaker and I have spoken over time about the importance of holding onto our House seats, our margin in New Jersey because when you've got a House that is as narrowly split as the House is today and you look at the recent – when I say recent, over past five years of history where New Jersey went from 6-6 to 10-2. There's an obvious amount of focus from her and there has been since I've been in this position. She and I go back and forth on that a lot. I would suspect that we'll have even more specific discussions, but she has been laser-focused on keeping our margins in New Jersey and has been really a very helpful ally as you can guess at every step of the way.

With that, I'm going to take a quick swig of water, Judy, if you'll permit me, and then mask up. Again, we're masking up not because we changed our policies but because we're in a state building. That's the policy that we have. Again, that – we'll be looking at that, and that will evolve over time. I want to thank, as always, Judy and Tina for being here; thank you both. Brian, great to have you, a real treat, and thank you for everything you're doing. Since we've been sitting here, I've gotten many texts, one from an adult returning to community college student and one from a president of a four-year university, both effusive about the programs that you announced today. Pat, as always, Dan, Parimal, cast of thousands, thank you, folks. Please keep doing the right thing. Please, please, please get vaccinated. Be careful with the weather. Pat, you got thunderstorm warnings you say tonight?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan:** Tonight and tomorrow.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Tonight and tomorrow, so be careful, everybody, out there. God bless. Thank y'all.

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