

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: April 29th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. Honored to be joined by the woman to my right, who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health Judy Persichilli. To her right, someone also in that category, the State's Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan. To my left, and the guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Pat Callahan. Director of the Department of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples, is with us, and I know Chief Counsel Matt Platkin will be with us shortly.

Let's begin, as we have been doing of late, with today's updated numbers and charts, and may this never become just about numbers. Today we're announcing an additional 2,481 positive test results for a statewide total of 116,264. Here's how these numbers chart out. The only way that we can get New Jersey on the road back is if we all continue our social distancing over the coming weeks to really bend this curve down and keep it going down. It is clearly beginning to head in the right direction.

Looking statewide at a map that we show you from time to time, the rate of doubling of new cases continues slowing in most counties. We need to get every county to that lightest shade, and that means it's doubling in those counties no less than 30 days or more. We need to see COVID-19 being defeated, not just in most places in our state, but in every place. The map is largely better, and again, I'm going to hit a little on the regional reality right now, Judy will give you a little bit more. There's no question this is migrating south.

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again, as I said yesterday, the numbers in the south are meaningfully lower, which is an important point overall, but we have positive tests in every county. Sadly, we have fatalities in every county. We've got to get the entire state on that over 30 shade, and then hopefully we'll go to a different color scheme.

In our healthcare system, as of last night's reporting, there were 6,289 patients hospitalized for COVID-19. This is one metric where over the past week, we have seen overall decreases and that's really good news. This graph shows, as I mentioned, by region, how many patients our hospitals are treating. Judy's been pounding away on this point, and we decided to show it to you graphically. As we can see, we're seeing a downward bend of the curve across both North Jersey especially, and now Central Jersey, but we're seeing the increases hitting South Jersey.

Now, folks, if you can't see it, the good news is the scale is a lot smaller in the South, but it is still a curve that's going up and not down and we need to get the back of that curve cracked and headed in the right direction. Our field medical stations reported 61 patients and having treated 362 of our fellow New Jerseyans since opening. There were 1,811 patients in either critical or intensive care. This number is virtually unchanged from yesterday, but it remains significantly lower than one week ago. We've had a lot of speculation both up here in front of you and privately as to why the hospitalizations are coming down at a more acute curve or rate of reduction than the ICU units. I know Judy, you have made the point, I think that folks may be coming into the hospital sicker than was the case, say a month ago. But that's something that we are watching very closely.

Ventilator use ticked up a touch to 1,327 currently in use, but that's also significantly lower than even one week ago. There were 426 new hospitalizations yesterday, and the trend line continues to point in the right direction. Again, you've got some variability around that, but that's also invariably in and out of a weekend. On discharges, the New Jersey Hospital Association has changed the way our hospitals are reporting to remove those who have sadly passed away, so that we could say affirmatively that for the 24 hours preceding 10:00 p.m. last night, our hospitals discharged 474 live patients. Again, 48 more than folks who came in. This will be, by the way, the discharge metric that we're going to use as we report going forward.

I can't put this any other way. The data from our hospitals is critical in our gauging our readiness to put our state on the road back. These are real numbers, they are not estimates. They are not an incomplete picture, as we know testing numbers, in fact can be. They are an important measure of public health and of our healthcare system's status and readiness. These graphs if they continue to point downward, are all very good signs. But only we, you and me, can continue to push them down. Our mantra remains and must remain public health creates economic health. Public health creates economic health. That means we keep up with our social distancing. Our healthcare responders are doing heroic work, yes, but our goal collectively is to keep people from having to go to the hospital in the first place.

Now, that said, our state continues to lose many more from our family than any of us could have ever imagined. Today, we are reporting the loss of an additional 329 blessed souls, friends, family members, neighbors. We've now lost a total of 6,770 blessed souls from our New Jersey family to COVID-19 related complications. To put that in perspective, and let's just pause and think about this for a second. The number of 6,770 is more than New Jerseyans lost in World War I, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, both Gulf Wars, Afghanistan and Iraq, Superstorm Sandy and 9/11 combined. 6,770.

And by the way, the blessed souls that were lost in all of those wars and all of those attacks and incidents and storms, each and every one of them we keep in our memory and prayers. But to think that we've added, as of today, a number that is more than all of those combined, takes your breath away. I haven't done this in a while, but I'm going to ask us all to take a brief moment of silence.

God bless each and every one of them. Let's remember a few of them by name. First up, Dr. Arthur Freiman of Teaneck, New Jersey. Across a four decades long career, he was a champion of special needs students and their families. He spent 30 of those years with the Bergenfield Public School District. He retired three years ago after having transformed special education and Bergenfield from a place of isolation to a place of inclusion. But, he came out of the bullpen. He returned for the second half of 2019 to help guide a transition there in the guidance department. Dr. Freiman created the TriValley Academy, which today serves 83 students

with autism. He developed an alternative middle school, and also a high school that boasts a 97% graduation rate. And he continued working with educators, training them on the use of new assistive technologies to create personalized learning plans for their students.

For his commitment and dedication, Dr. Freiman received various awards, but I know that his greatest reward was in seeing his students and their educators excel. To his wife, Jean, with whom I had the honor of speaking yesterday afternoon, and their family and friends, and to all the students and families and lives touched by Dr. Freiman, we send our deepest condolences, thoughts and prayers. God bless that guy.

Next up, Latasha Andrews. Pat Callahan knows her well. Latasha was a civil civilian security staff member guard with the New Jersey State Police. It was a post that she held for 14 years. On the job she was recognized for her unwavering professionalism and poise, but off the clock she was a daughter, a granddaughter, an aunt, sister, niece, cousin and friend. Known by her family and friends for her eye for fashion and her passion for traveling, and she was always ready to share an adventure with them. Tasha was only 33 years old. She grew up in East Orange with her dad Walter, with whom I had the great honor of speaking yesterday, and her mom Gloria. She was described as, and I quote, "A kind and beautiful soul who was always the first to offer help to those in need." Tragically, Tasha's mother, grandfather, and uncle, I learned from Walter in Florida, also had passed due to COVID-19. It's unimaginable. She leaves behind her father Walter, her brothers, Corinne and Taiquan, and many nieces and nephews, aunts, uncles, cousins and countless friends and colleagues. I know I can speak on behalf of Colonel Pat Callahan and indeed the entirety of the State Police and our entire state, Tasha, we thank you for your service. May God bless you and your family.

Finally, we have lost Harvey Feldman. Two weeks ago, we remembered his beloved wife, Margit, and now we mourn Harvey. Last month, Harvey turned 91 years old, and that was a relatively recent photo. He's looking terrific. He was born and raised in Brooklyn and it was while he was in a New York hospital, recovering from tuberculosis that he met Margit. And as I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, she was a Holocaust survivor. It was a story of love at first sight. Harvey and Margit married in December of 1953, and shared the next 66 years together. They built a life together in New Jersey, and had two children, Tina, and Joseph, and Joseph, a medical doctor himself. Again, I spoke with him yesterday and I said Joe, we've got to stop making a habit out of this. It's extraordinary that I've now spoken to him twice in the past couple of weeks about each of his parents passing.

Harvey, his dad, was the owner of Doctors Medical Laboratory in Bound Brook, but also found time to support Margit in her work against prejudice and for tolerance, and join her as a fierce advocate for Holocaust and genocide education. I know they would want me to say never again. To Tina and Joseph and their children Karen, Joshua and Zachary, words cannot express the pain that we share with you. May both Harvey's and Margit's memories be blessings to you and to us all. Three more beautiful lives gone. We all know what we have to do to prevent more from being lost. Stay at it, folks.

Switching gears, I do have a few announcements to make today. First, I'm signing an Executive Order reopening our state parks and allowing for golf courses to reopen. This Order will take effect at sunrise on this Saturday, May 2. This will bring us in line, broadly speaking, with our neighboring states.

As I have previously said, I did not want to see us in a situation where residents would be needlessly crossing state lines in either direction. County governments will regain the authority to decide whether county parks will be open or closed. Now to be clear, we cannot have everyone rush out to a park or golf course. Social distancing will be strongly enforced, and we expect golf course personnel to enforce this requirement. All parks whether they be state, county, or municipal will have parking capped at 50 percent of capacity. And we would ask you, we can't make you do this, but we want you to stay close to home. If you choose to go to a park, beginning Saturday at sunrise, go to one that's near you. Playgrounds and pavilions including, by the way, visitor centers and restrooms must be closed. Picnics or other organized activities and team sports, sadly, will be prohibited.

And our reopening comes with a strong recommendation that everyone wear a face covering when social distancing measures -- I'm just going to say something which I'm not even going to agree with -- when they're difficult to maintain. Period, we want you to wear face coverings. I have not mandated this as part of the Executive Order. It is a strong recommendation that you cover your face. But Judy and I and Pat reserve the

right to mandate that. We'll be looking very, very closely this weekend in how people adhere to these, both social distancing guidelines as well as whether or not you're covering your face. But for passive recreation, including running, and hiking, biking, fishing, boating, kayaking, and horseback riding, come Saturday morning, our state parks will be open once again.

I recognize and appreciate, including many friends, every one of you who reached out to me privately whether it was a text, a phone call, to the many of you who spoke publicly over the past several weeks, including some of the protesters who urged this action. I don't know how to say this delicately. But with the exception of the mental health case that many of you have come my way, your interventions to me did not matter one little bit. With all due respect to all the pressure that's been out there, we couldn't frankly care. We make this call based on data, science, fact and again, the exception is also on mental health. Trust me, I did not order these closures on a whim. They were made only after detailed discussions, particularly with the likes of the folks to my right, with our public health, especially our public health and public safety personnel.

Our goal has been simple and clear, and that is to slow the spread and decrease the rate of infection in the absence of either a vaccine or proven therapeutic. There's been some good vibrations around both of those over the past couple of days. I hope that all turns out to be true. The only tools we have are covering your face and social distancing.

This means we've had to make hard choices, but these choices I know have saved lives. I am the one who bears the burden of making these decisions and there is no amount of incoming that I won't take to save the life of one child, one mother, one father, one grandparent, one neighbor. I make this decision today based on the facts and the data on the ground as I laid out in the plan, that I laid out on Monday. We have seen a consistent reduction in some key metrics, including hospitalizations. I am hopeful that we are getting on the road back and with what appears to be a beautiful spring weekend before us, I am pleased to make this announcement today.

Secondly, I'm signing in an additional Executive Order that will allow petitions seeking to place municipal or county initiatives or referendums on the ballot to be signed electronically, just as we have allowed for candidate petitions. No one, and I mean no one, should be going door to door either campaigning or collecting signatures, and we should ensure that initiative and referendum campaigns can proceed, but in a way that is consistent with public health.

Switching gears again, and from the Department of Labor, recipients of the first round of federal pandemic unemployment assistance payments to self-employed workers, independent contractors, and other workers who are usually not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits will be notified today and will receive those payments beginning next week. The department has worked very hard over the past month to get this program up and running and it is now available. If you are self-employed, an independent contractor or a gig worker, you can find information on how to apply for so-called PUA benefits by going to [covid19.nj.gov](https://www.covid19.nj.gov) and typing self-employed in the search box. From there you'll find a link to the department's resources.

On a similar path, and this comes from the Social Security Administration, if you receive supplemental security income and have a child eligible for the \$500 stimulus payment and you have not filed your tax return, you must use the non-filer web form available at [irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov) by next Tuesday, May 5, to ensure that you receive that \$500 in a timely manner.

Next, as it relates to PPE, I have noted that building resiliency is a key principle of our road back, as we must be prepared for either any spikes as we restart, or potentially a worse winter or whatever may come down the road. We hope for the best, but we have to prepare for the worst. I'm proud to announce that the state is partnering with the members of the New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program to produce our own face masks and gowns right here in the Garden State. I don't have a lot of details on that but I'm thrilled that we are partnering and that is official. We'll give you details in terms of capacities and potential output when we get them.

And while we're at it, and Pat deserves an enormous amount of credit here, I'm proud to announce that we have now distributed more than 21 million pieces of personal protective equipment to our frontline essential workers. That was a line of business New Jersey was not even in two months ago. Today, 21 million pieces distributed.

As someone who was born in Boston and still has a lot of family up there, I am honored and proud to say that we are sending 50 ventilators to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in their hour of need, as they're in the midst of their surge and we could not be more proud and honored to do that. And at the direction and in consultation with our friends Angelo and Tina Koo, who I mentioned the other day, have given us a huge amount of masks. We are shipping 200,000 surgical masks to New York State.

On testing, we have 104 locations across the state where residents can be tested for COVID-19. A listing and map of the 31 publicly run and community-based testing sites can be found on our information hub at covid19.nj.gov/testing. In addition, there are 73 other privately operated sites across the state to which your primary care practitioner can direct you to.

As I've said before, as we've said, I think we could say countless times, Judy, expanding access to testing is among our highest priorities. We've gone as a nation from being completely unprepared in New Jersey from a standing start to now testing, I think the third or fourth highest most-tested state in America. It's among our highest priorities as a robust and accessible testing program is not only a need for the here and now, but a need for us, as we discussed, on our road to recovery. It's incredibly important as we restart our economy. In this, we're continually seeking ways to maximize our partnerships with Rutgers University, by example, with our private labs and with our federal partners to reach our goal. Remember, public health creates economic health. That is the order, that is the mantra, that is what guides us. Having a strong testing program in place is critical for us to ensure the former so that we can ensure together the latter.

Now before I hand things over to Judy, I want to continue our practice of giving credit where it is due and highlighting some of the ordinary New Jerseyans doing extraordinary things that are helping us get through this emergency. I just looked today, and I don't have a slide for this, but I just looked at the calls of thanks that I had made and texts of thanks I made to our brothers and sisters in organized labor and just added up what's been going on over the past number of days. To the painters and their allied trades, Vinnie Lane and his team at District Council 71 donating a couple of thousand face masks. Today I heard from Rich Tolson, the Bricklayers Union are giving money to several of the hardest hit hospitals. The IBEW brothers and sisters have come forward, as always, in our hour of need and it's just extraordinary. To my friend Dan Costner and his brothers and sisters at IBEW 351 to Rob Shimcoe and Erico Tailing at IBEW Local 400, to Wayne D'Angelo and Steve Aldridge and IBEW 269, to Joe Egan, our dear friend at IBEW 456 and all of his brothers and sisters, it just sort of goes on and on and on. If that weren't enough, I looked down today and saw that Assemblyman Roy Freiman has donated himself a pallet of Lysol spray and a pallet of Lysol wipes to the state police. God bless each and every one of them.

Let's come up with a picture of a guy who lives not too far from me. First up is Bobby Hoye. There's Bobby. He's a senior at Rumson Fair Haven Regional High School, where he was also captain, by the way, of the track team. Bobby was training for what would have been his first marathon, the New Jersey Marathon, which was scheduled for this past Sunday. But why let all that training go to waste? Bobby concluded. He decided to run his marathon anyway, in his home, on a treadmill, and to use it as an opportunity to ask friends and family to pledge money to support Jersey Shore University Medical Centers COVID-19 Relief Fund. He enlisted the help of his friend and fellow senior Peyton Ming to help livestream his run. In five hours and 25 minutes and 16 seconds, and nearly \$6,000 later, Bobby finished his marathon. He didn't get a finishers medal, unfortunately, but he has our deepest admiration and respect for an extraordinary accomplishment.

And for anyone who's ever run one, two or three miles on a treadmill, as I have on many occasions, that's hard enough. Can you imagine running 26.2 of them? And he did it. So to you Bobby Hoye, and assist to Peyton Ming, congratulations. New Jersey thanks you and go Bulldogs.

Next, I have to give a shout out to one of North Jersey's truly iconic restaurants. Nanina's in the Park, a place many of us have probably been many times, I think many for me would be measured in the hundreds. Nanina's along with the Park Chateau and the Park Savoy are owned by Joe and Barry Maurillo, dear friends, and Vito Cucci. Pulling their staffs and resources together, they have been catering roughly 2,000 meals a week for workers at St. Barnabas Medical Center, Clara Maass Medical Center, and the Morristown Medical Center. They're also getting meals to local police and they made a donation, if that weren't enough, to Hackensack Meridian Health as well. So Joe, Barry, and Vito, thank you. You represent the tremendous spirit

that we've seen from so many business owners across our state who have been stepping up to support our front lines. To them and the entire team at Nanina's, New Jersey thanks you, and I know the hungry folks on our front lines especially thank you.

And that's as good a place as any to finish. If you have someone in your community stepping up, we want to know about it. Tell us their story on social media and use the #NJThanksYou. These stories are giving us hope and optimism for the better days we know will come. We can hasten their arrival if we keep doing what I know millions of you are already doing, keeping up with your social distancing, washing your hands and staying at home. And may I just say this about the parks? We're going to be looking very, very closely up and down the state this weekend. I'm happy at one level that we're able to take this step, but we will enforce this. If we don't like what we see, I hate to say this, I reserve the right to reverse the Executive Order that I'm signing today. So please enjoy the parks, but stay away from each other. Do not congregate. Wear a face covering, be responsible. If we have a good weekend this weekend, that hopefully can lead to better days ahead. We can keep these parks open.

And again, we're going to win this. We will get there, I promise you, and we'll get there together. Let's do this. We're one New Jersey family and remember, we're New Jersey. Nobody can touch us. 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. Good afternoon. We are getting reports that individuals in the state may be delaying the needed healthcare that they require. So today, the New Jersey Hospital Association President, Kathleen Bennett, and I will be filming a public service announcement to remind the public that if you're experiencing signs and symptoms that could be a heart attack or a stroke, or unrelenting abdominal pain or back pain, you should not delay in seeking care. Call 911 and go to your nearest emergency room. Slurred speech, muscle weakness, hip or back pain requiring opioids or chest discomfort, lightheadedness, are symptoms to take seriously and to act upon.

Yes, we know this is an unprecedented pandemic that we're faced with, and I know that people may be fearful, wondering, is it safe to go to the hospital? Are they ready? Is there room for me? They're so busy. Will I be taken care of? Well, I've worked in hospitals for the entire of my career and I can assure you that our hospitals and our emergency rooms are safe and waiting. They are waiting and ready to care for you.

Our hospitals have been safe havens for all of you who have walked through their doors for over a century, open 24/7, 365 days a year, they are always available to everyone. So I urge you, do not delay going to your local emergency room if you are experiencing signs and symptoms of a heart attack or stroke. Face drooping, arm weakness or numbness, slurred speech or difficulty speaking, sudden confusion or trouble seeing may be signs of an impending stroke. Chest pain or pressure, pain or discomfort in arms, back, neck, jaw, or stomach, shortness of breath, nausea or lightheadedness may be signs of a heart attack. Every minute counts when experiencing a heart attack or stroke, so please do not delay seeking care. Don't delay. It may save your life.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen to that.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Last evening, our hospitals reported 6,289 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients or those under investigation, and 1,811 of those individuals are in critical care with 73% on ventilators. Last evening, only two hospitals in the state, and they were in the Central region, went on divert. One hospital was on full divert, and one hospital was on divert for specialty services only.

Today, as the Governor shared, we're reporting 2,481 new cases for a total of 116,264 cases in the state. I'm sad to share that there have been 329 new deaths for a total of 6,770 fatalities. The breakdown of deaths by race and ethnicity is as follows: White 52.3%, Black 20.1%, Hispanic 16.9%, Asian 5.1% and other 5.5%.

There are 489 long-term care facilities in the state reporting at least one case of COVID-19. That is a total of 18,045 cases in our long-term care and assisted living facilities. At the state veteran homes, among the census of 704 residents there have been 274 residents that tested positive, for a total of 104 deaths of residents, 45 at the Menlo Park facility and 59 at the Paramus facility. Universal testing of residents and staff

is taking place and yesterday in Menlo Park, they started and it should be completed today or tomorrow. At our state psychiatric hospitals, 157 patients have tested positive and there have been nine deaths as I have previously reported.

According to lab data, as of this morning, labs have reported 216,221 tests performed; 91,167 have returned positive for a positivity rate of 42.16%. That concludes my daily report. Stay connected, stay safe, stay healthy. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you. The positivity, again, to underscore that,, that's an important data point. I know you and Christina look at and that is as low as it's been in a while. And again, remember, we still are testing overwhelmingly, not entirely, but overwhelmingly symptomatic folks, right?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: As a county matter which I always try to follow up in terms of positive cases, it's the same six counties with the most cases. Bergen followed by Hudson, Essex, Union, Passaic and Middlesex. But if you look at the cases that we announced today, the top three counties in order are Passaic, Middlesex, and Essex. Middlesex was in there both yesterday and today, and it gives you some sense of the migration of things. I thought we were, you and I, Judy, along with Sheila Oliver, and the Attorney General were on last night with a good group of Black Legislative leadership, other county African American leadership, other organizations, Institute for Social Justice, Reverend Boyer and his colleagues. I thought it was a very good discussion, but the fact of the matter is the African American fatality number continues to be bouncing. It's a little less than 50% now, but it's still meaningfully above the representation in the whole of New Jersey, and that's something that the Lieutenant Governor, Judy and I spoke to, that concerns us. That we're focused on not just in the near term, but also as we're on that road to recovery, we mentioned that important pillar of resiliency. Part of that is to make sure we don't see the disparities that we're seeing, particularly as it relates to communities of color. I thought it was a good discussion. In any event, thank you, as always, for your leadership today and as always.

Pat, likewise to you, any update on PPE, capacities, compliance, etc.?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Compliance, thanks, Governor. Good afternoon, everybody. With regard to the overnight and compliance, the organizer of yesterday's protest, charges have been authorized against her. In Newark, 120 individuals were cited for EO violations. In Perth Amboy, 17 individuals were cited, they had gathered for the purpose of filming a video and 17 were cited. In Lakewood, one subject was cited, had over 20 people gathering in front of a residence there. Also in Perth Amboy, police cited 15 individuals that were patrons of an unlicensed social club.

And if I can just tag on to your comment about the Massachusetts donation, Governor. I did speak with the Office of Preparedness and Emergency Management from Massachusetts this morning, Kerin Milesky and just completely grateful. I think it's also a good sign that those 50 are coming from the 100 that Hackensack Meridian were returning to our warehouse. We're going to have them up to Massachusetts within the next few days. As I said, Kerin wanted to make sure that you, Governor, and the State of New Jersey knew how grateful the State of Massachusetts is and again, the other piece is, it's a good sign when we're getting ventilators back from the hospitals that we delivered to them over the last few weeks. That's all I've got, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Amen, and it's close to home for me because I've got a lot of family up there and they're going through a tough stretch. I've also known their Governor for 48 years, he and I both went to high school and college together. He's a great guy. It's important to note, Pat, these are not any of the 500 that we bought. These are ones that, in fact, and I want to acknowledge, the federal administration has to bless this. So it's a virtual pass from Hackensack Meridian. That's a good sign that they're giving them back to us. I hope we get a lot more back, Judy, sooner than later. But there's a virtual pass through the Federal Stockpile on the way up to Massachusetts. We had made that offer and I want to also thank the Trump administration for blessing it.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: That's correct. And just into the same process, the 100 that California gave us a few weeks ago have been disinfected and returned back out to California, and/or the National Stockpile, however that works. Hopefully it takes on as the national model that we kind of cascade these ventilators and anything else, staffing, PPE, to the areas that need it.

Governor Phil Murphy: And we had promised that we would do this in our hour of need. A lot of folks stood up and helped us out when it was unspeakably challenging for us. And by the way, folks, please keep doing what you're doing because we could see that again, and I hope we don't. But we promised that at the right moment, when we could responsibly stand up and help others, we would do so, and so I'm honored, Pat. Thank you for leading that. We're going to start, Brendan, over here with Matt. Please, Matt. Good afternoon. We'll keep these, if you could, to a couple or three.

Q&A Session

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Sure, just a quick one right off the bat. Just with the parks opening up, is this any sign about what could be expected with beaches in the next couple of weeks, or after Memorial Day? Governor, we continue to hear from readers who have not yet received unemployment payments, some for more than a month or more. I know you have announced steps to increase the output, but are there any additional efforts being made to reduce the backlog? Especially considering going a month without any income is a big deal for many people.

Governor, President Trump said yesterday he would support state local aid if, quote, "We'd want certain things also, including sanctuary city adjustments." I'm curious what your reaction is to those comments and if you think it's a fair trade off?

Governor Phil Murphy: You know, I think these are all going to be me, Matt Platkin. Matt, I introduced you in absentia, you're now with us. We'll see how it goes in terms of whether opening parks, if folks do what we're asking them to do, that will have a huge impact on our ability to take other, what I call baby steps. I'm not implying opening parks is a baby step, but the hip bone is connected to the thigh bone here. Let's see how the parks go, but no decisions yet, or imminently on beaches, etc.

And as Matt reminds me, there's only technically one beach that we control, which is Island Beach State Park. The other beaches, these are going to be guidance that we offer to municipalities.

I know that the Department of Labor has chopped through an enormous amount of the backlog and I have enormous sympathy for the folks out there who still haven't gotten theirs and they're frustrated and their accounts are dwindling. I think what I'm going to suggest is, Dan, to ask you to get Rob Angelo to go directly to Matt and give him an exact data point, or give it to me for tomorrow's or Friday's briefing in terms of giving you the exact numbers. They have plussed up, but I don't want to just give you generalities.

Yeah, I saw what the – we've got a lot of balls in the air so I don't literally watch the President's dailies but I do see clips and/or read about it. I saw that he said that. I don't really have any reaction, I just would say the only reaction I still have is we're desperately in need of money. We're still not in the end zone on the interpretation of the CARES Act. I think we've made progress, but we're not there yet and that's going to be a fraction of what we need overall and that's a conversation that I look forward to having with the President, I hope sooner than later. I just reiterate, as we have with the Congressional leaders, other governors. I mentioned I was on with Governor Hogan. I've lost track yesterday, or the day before. He's the chair of the NGA, Republican Governor from Maryland. It's not just a Democratic need. It's not just a New Jersey need. And it is literally to pay for the very folks at the front line who we need to keep on the payroll.

The alternative here is an ugly one for everybody. For the individuals who would get laid off for the lack of service that we would be able to provide, it would be a mess. Unemployment would go up. Never mind folks wouldn't be served in their hour of need in the biggest healthcare crisis in the history of our country, but the unemployment ranks would swell and we can't have any of that. I look forward to following up with him. We'll get you the Department of Labor's specific follow up. Elise, good afternoon.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Good afternoon. Mark Pitera, who oversaw the veterans homes, is no longer on the job. Did he resign? Was he forced out? Also with regard to the Paramus Veterans Home, there was swift action on a state investigation in the case of the Andover home. Does Paramus warrant one as well?

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it? To the best of my knowledge, General Pitera resigned. I literally have no more color. Another guy who I've known well, Walter Nall has now stepped in, into that position. I've got literally no more color on that, Elise. The only thing I would say, and Judy can come in here behind me, the VA

is in Paramus in a big way. I was asked this question by John McAlpin the other day, whether I could opine as to what the state of play was there in terms of, was it being run to the proper standards, etc.?

Remember, the VA has plussed us up in both Menlo Park and in Paramus. In the case of Paramus, in addition to plussing us up with medical personnel, they are helping us, in fact, run the operation there. I'm looking to make sure Vineland, we've seen a slight uptick in numbers here, Judy, I'm not sure you went through the dailies, but we've got five confirmed cases in Vineland. Two folks pending and two hospitalized, and thank God at the moment, no deaths. We've got one confirmed case among staff there and three pending.

But I would say this. Part of the reason why the VA is in there, in particular in Paramus, is to be our eyes and ears. I'm going to defer on that, just because they're there for a reason. It's not just as they are a Menlo Park to plus up the staffing. It's also to help oversee the management, as well as plus up the staffing in Paramus. Anything you'd add to that? Please.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: When we called them in, we had two conference calls with them to determine exactly what they would be doing. They're assessing leadership, assessing the training, particularly infection prevention, and educating the staff and looking at all of their sanitation processes. It's a complete assessment of not only Paramus, but also Menlo Park.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Judy. Thanks, Elise. Dustin, I think that's you back there, but I can't see you. There you go.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: I just have a couple, but I also have one from a colleague as well, if you could just give me a little bit of leeway. Can you give any updated details on the state's plan to test prison inmates and whether any more have been released?

Is the data on deaths and cases at nursing homes now clean? And does it include both staff and residents, or just residents?

Governor, do you have any comments on the open letter from a group of education groups, including the NJEA, asking you to keep schools closed for the rest of the year?

And then from my colleague at redbankgreen.com, the Red Bank Regional Board of Education have planned to meet in person tonight, but recently decided to meet virtually. Is that a signal to you that you're concerned about? Where you might have school boards and local governments seeming to defy your Executive Orders? What tools do you have in response if that happens?

Governor Phil Murphy: What's the last part of the question?

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: What tools do you have in response if that does happen, where governments are meeting in person?

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, I'll take the last two. And then Matt, if you don't mind doing the prison inmate release question. Judy, maybe you can hit testing in prisons, as well as data in nursing homes. Nothing new on the school closings, really, literally nothing to report on that. It's something we're looking at very carefully. We said they're virtual until at least May 15 and that we would make an announcement before that date. The only thing new I would say is, my gut tells me regardless of which way we go, we'll probably beat that meaningfully, by at least some number of days, in terms of when we make an announcement. We respect the inputs that we've gotten, but nothing to report.

I wasn't aware of Red Bank Regional. Folks should not be gathering and we will enforce that and there's only one set of Executive Orders that matter, and it's ours. Folks should be meeting virtually. And again, if we see bad compliance and bad behavior at parks this weekend just as quickly as we've reopened them we'll close them again. I don't know whether it was an act of defiance, I have no insight into it, but they should not be congregating, period. Folks should not be congregating. The meeting should be done virtually.

Matt, anything on the progress of releasing of folks from our criminal justice system?

Chief Counsel Matt Platkin: Yeah. So 54 inmates have been released, there are an additional 24 that are scheduled for release. This review is ongoing, so that number will change. With respect to testing at both DOC and JJC facilities, they're rolling out plans in partnership with Rutgers to test inmates and eventually test

staff as well.

Just two additional points that were sent to me from Matt's questions. The overwhelming majority of unemployment claims that are still outstanding that are old are for the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program which is now up and running. Matt, we can get you more details if you need it. And just with respect to beaches, nothing in today's Order changes the fact that municipalities can close beaches on their own, as they've had the ability to. But obviously, with the Commissioner and Governor, you're reviewing options for the summer months.

Governor Phil Murphy: Well put. Judy, any comment on the nursing home data and/or any other matters?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: For the South Jersey nursing homes that we reviewed, 16% of the residents tested positive, 9% of the staff tested positive. That's with 92% of the results and we expect 100% of the results in today, and then we'll be working with all of those nursing homes to make sure that they follow all of the guidance that we've put out in the past.

Governor Phil Murphy: Matt, you answered the question on testing among corrections, right? Thank you. Thanks, Dustin. Sir, anything? You moved back, you're messing with me here.

Reporter: Keeping you on your toes, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Exactly. You're the only one.

Reporter: Governor, can you explain your abrupt change in parks now being open? Is it based on some new data or recalculation of the existing risk? How will social distancing be enforced in parks?

The Restart and Recovery Commission announced yesterday, will the members of that Commission be paid? Where's that money expected to come from?

Colonel, finally, could you give us some color? What charges were authorized against the organizer of yesterday's protests in Trenton?

Governor Phil Murphy: Pat, I'll start and then ask you to clean it up, if that's okay. The parks, I wouldn't say an abrupt change because these are much more, any decisions we take are much more iterative than they appear in public. I can appreciate the fact that it feels abrupt because yesterday we said they're closed and today we're saying, as of Saturday morning, by the way, that they'll be open. But it none of this is abrupt. We are constantly looking at all sides of this. Dustin asked about education and the balance of the school year. That's something we're constantly looking at. We'll have an announcement on one day.

I'd say it's a combination of things. I mentioned this, all the incomings we took didn't impact me a bit one way or the other, literally not one speck, except for the arguments that Judy has spoken eloquently about. We've had other Commissioners, the mental health argument did play into this. But I will say this. If the curves that we show you every day were raging up, we would not be doing what we did today, even notwithstanding that mental health argument. There is some amount of reduction in some of the most important curves that we're looking at. Hospitalizations, I think, most importantly. Even though we're not sure what the universe is of folks who have been infected, the positivity rate coming down sort of every single day for the past 7 or 10 days of those who have been tested.

Remember, by the way, two things. Remember, they're overwhelmingly symptomatic. And as Ed Lifshitz reminded me, that's the cumulative number. The number on any given day lately, in a particular county, is meaningfully lower than that.

And then thirdly, we're basically saying, we're prepared to trust you. You've been trusting us and we will never forget that. We're returning some amount of that trust by saying, listen, we're going to open these up, but you've got to behave in a certain way. And that is, you can't congregate. You've got to keep your distance and we're not making you but I'm telling you, I'm strongly recommending you to wear face covering.

How are we going to enforce it? It's going to be through a variety of different ways. It'll be State Park Police, it'll be enforced by the county, clearly at the county level. Pat will have groups as he did in that first weekend in April when it was really good weather and we saw some horrifying results. The parking capacities will be managed locally, as I mentioned, at 50%. I admit you can't bat 1,000, right? You can't go to every corner of

every park with somebody on a one-on-one basis following you around. But we're going to be pretty pervasive. And again, early week, if we don't like what we see over the weekend, I'm not trying to be a jerk about this. If we literally, if we see congregation of people and they're not social distancing, they're not wearing face masks, we will reconsider.

The Commission members are not paid, so there's no question about where the money's coming from, because there is none. And I'm going to turn it to Pat on either the parks or what the charges were for yesterday. Again, I said the following about yesterday, people have a right to protest. I wish they would do it from home. I don't agree with them on this. Please don't claim that we're not patriotic by flying the American flag and implying that we don't fly it. I fly five of them at my house. I love my country. I love my state. We all do. We're trying to save lives. But the thing that really bothered me was they were congregating. And they weren't wearing masks, for the most part, and they were on top of each other and that's what led to the answer Pat's going to give you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Basically, it's a violation of the Executive Order that is filed on a complaint summons and vetted through, in this instance, Mercer County Prosecutor's Office.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. And by the way, we're going to be, Pat is it fair to say, again, I wish folks would protest from home and virtually, but if they're going to protest, we're going to be tough on enforcing the no congregation.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: I mean, to your point, Governor, the Executive Orders don't prohibit people from exercising their right to protest, but they're very clear, especially EO 107 and others, about the ban on gatherings. The tough part, with that backdrop in mind, when law enforcement has to, you know, boots on the ground like we were here yesterday and we need to make decisions on how to engage with those protesters. We're doing it with both public safety at the forefront and public health. But I think it's fair to say, I think the troopers showed a tremendous amount of restraint yesterday. Social distancing for those protests, I put it out there and organizers will be advised ahead of time, social distancing and face coverings. If that's not in place and we don't witness that, then you will be cited accordingly with a violation of the Executive Order.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you again. Let's go to Daniel. Daniel, good to have you.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: Three questions about the Commission. First, I'm wondering what you're hoping to hear from these members of what you're looking for? What was the logic behind appointing who you did?

Second, I'm just a bit curious about why you appointed Neera Tanden from the Center for American Progress and Evelyn Colbert from Montclair.

Third, it doesn't appear that there's any representative from the leadership of RWJ Atlantic Health and Hackensack Meridian, as well as any of the state chambers or local business associations. Why is that?

Governor Phil Murphy: What I am looking for from these folks is wisdom and counsel. We're going through something that none of us have ever gone through before and we're doing our best. I think we've used an analogy that many have used. We don't see a light switch, we see sort of a dimmer switch getting turned on gradually and we need as much input and advice, particularly from a variety of perspectives. I could say definitively we are not close to having all the answers. As great as the team is that I'm honored to go to work with every day, we need folks who have, in many cases, seen it all, done at all, from a different angle.

I would just say each of the members of this Commission bring something very specific and very, I would use the word exceptional, to the group that includes Neera and Evie and I could go through and comment about each and every one of them. But Evie's bias is obviously in the arts, we want to make sure we're not just America's leading STEM state, but continue to be America's leading STEM state when the dust settles. Neera runs one of the most important think tanks in our country and has been explicitly and particularly good herself, not just her organization, at how to deal with this pandemic and everything from, how do you shut down versus how do you reopen? She and her team have been unusually good on this.

No one turned us down. I'm honored by that, and we could have had a Commission that was multiples the size of the one we had, so we had to pick our spots and make sure that we felt comfortable with not just the people and they are extraordinary, I am humbled that they're serving, but also that it was a manageable size.

And again, to the healthcare systems you referenced, those are folks we know intimately. We know those systems intimately. Judy deals with them literally every day. I deal with their leadership most days. They're already there. They're part of us. Someone asked me yesterday about Choose New Jersey. It's another good example of that. We know that they're there. We've been relying on them. They've done extraordinary, the healthcare systems have done almost universally an extraordinary job and we're going to need them to continue to help us as we rebuild this thing.

There is a big economic element to this as well. There is clearly, of the six mile posts, four of them are heavy healthcare, get the curves down, testing protocols, contact tracing protocols, isolation protocols. We think we're getting our arms around what we need to do with those four. We need a lot of help with, okay, now you've got that in place? What does it look like then? Not just your economic recovery, but your resiliency? How are you going to deal with these, by example, the lack of capacities that we had? Or these racial and social inequities that we're discussing literally almost every day? Thank you for that.

Dave, you get to send us out today.

Dave Schatz, New Brunswick Today: Okay, a couple of questions, first one on antibody testing. It's being ramped up dramatically in many parts of the country, including New York, where they now estimate 25%, about, of all of the people tested in New York City have COVID-19 antibodies. LabCorp announced yesterday that they're offering this testing along with Quest. I got an email yesterday from LabCorp. What can antibody testing do or not do for New Jersey? I know we've talked about it's only a point-in-time snapshot and it doesn't necessarily follow with contact tracing. But is there a value in getting a better sense of how many people in New Jersey actually have been exposed to COVID-19 in our state?

And the second question, as you have been talking about, we discussed yesterday, Governor, you know, you were called a fascist for closing part of the state. One State Senator has been referring to you as King Murphy, although you don't have your own sound music wherever you go, so that might be questionable. But this whole issue with the parks and golf courses, does this send a signal that you're not acting irrationally? Do you think, I mean, I understand you're saying it's not from the pushback that you got. But I mean, what's important for Jersey residents to keep in mind in terms of the way you're looking at making decisions? Is this a situation where your decision-making process is based on reasonableness, do you think? Is it based on science and fact? Instead of you just trying to usurp power? What do you want people in our state to know about this?

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for both of those questions. I suspect that the right person to hand your first question to, with one brief comment, would be Christina, as she in fact is the epidemiologist but you make a very good – just, I'll make two points. Number one, we've got an army at the ROIC right now working literally morning, noon and night on testing of all shapes and sizes, including antibody. We want to make sure that we spend our bullets appropriately.

Matt and I were discussing this earlier, and I think for folks out there who may not have a good sense of it, in a non-medical sense, you've got sort of two options here. The snapshot of a moment in time versus the watching the movie and seeing your life play out. That's sort of the difference of the regimes here. I suspect we're going to firmly come down and we need both. We need them both for different reasons. But Christina will clean this up.

Again, the incomings, I don't even, literally, I don't even listen. I think if you don't have a thick skin, you're probably in the wrong seat, given the one that I'm in, but it literally is irrelevant to me. I do want to remind folks that we overwhelmingly make decisions based on facts and science and data, period. Some of that is hard, fast numbers, the curves that we're watching. Again, notwithstanding what is a softer but very important argument that Judy has been making, other Commissioners have been making, we all have as it relates to mental health and the impact on that, which is harder to put on a curve. But we are incredibly and deeply sympathetic to that argument. More than anecdotally, but certainly anecdotally.

But more than that, we're also looking at hard numbers. So notwithstanding the fact we may be sympathetic to the mental health challenges, whether they be all the things we've talked about: depression, addictions, domestic abuse, child abuse issues, which we monitor as best we can. If this were still raging, if the charts we show you every day were showing infection rates, hospitalization rates, positivity rates, deaths, which are still sadly too high, but remember, we've got that lagging reality here. We wouldn't be doing what we're doing today.

To some very significant degree, it is the bending of those curves. I do want folks to think that we're reasonable, but we're reasonable only if the facts allow us to be reasonable. We think they are allowing us. But I will say this: we will be unreasonable if the facts present this weekend a picture that is not one that we want to see. I just want to say this one, we're putting this, in many respects, into the hands of everybody out there. We'll open these parks up, we will be aggressive in enforcing and observing, but there's only so much we can do. We are expecting folks to not congregate, to keep their distance and I would hope that they would wear a face covering. Assuming that folks do that, and by the way, overwhelmingly New Jerseyans have been extraordinary over the past couple of months in doing what we've asked them to do. We need you to do that. And if you do that, those are other data points. Those are other facts that we'll be looking at. But if folks do that, then we'll have a little bit of ability to take some steam out of this enormous pressure that's been building up. Christina, how are you? Dr. Tan.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Christina Tan: I just want to take two seconds first just to quickly say that when we're talking about the ramping up of the testing and the contact tracing, we're referencing the diagnostic tests. Because the diagnostic tests like the PCRs, the molecular and antigen testing, they give you a result that you can actually act upon right away for immediate public health action, because it means that an individual might currently pose an infection risk to others. That's why then we do the contact tracing and so on. That's just the diagnostic piece.

To move on to talk a little bit more about the serological testing, the serological testing detects whether or not a person might have been exposed to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19. To your question about what it does and does not do, what we do know is that if you test positive for antibodies for SARS-CoV-2 it means that you were exposed to the virus at some point. What we do not know at this time is whether or not a person might actually have immunity to the disease. At this time, there's not enough information from these antibody tests to be able to make a determination, for example, for a back-to-work determination.

The utility of using these serological tests, and actually we're in the middle of discussions right now, not only within our state, with some regions, with what are called zero prevalence surveys. Similar to what New York is doing, similar to what, there's certain target areas that CDC in conjunction with certain areas in the country are in the process of developing these sero surveys to determine the burden of illness. To see how many individuals at a point in time might have been infected with SARS-CoV-2, because that gives us an indication of how much the virus actually impacted our community, as opposed to just what we're seeing at a point in time with our hospitalizations, with the cases that are acutely ill, that we detect with the other diagnostic method.

Governor Phil Murphy: Again, non-medical guy, you've also had a lot of press out there that there's a wide range of efficacy on the antibody testing. I think the WHO had looked recently, I recall reading over the past number days at 12 different models, only three of them had some amount of reliability; and even of those three, only one of them had complete reliability.

Thank you, everybody. I put my mask on but I want to say something else, I realized. By the way, I would just say this. I've lived in Germany twice. I think the folks who use the word fascist have to be very, very careful. To Margit Freiman, who we lost a couple of weeks ago, let's be very careful with the words we use right now. We're up here. We're trying to save lives. We don't have all the answers, but we're trying to save lives. That's, frankly, the exact opposite of what that word implies.

I'm looking at Dan, because we're not sure on what our schedule is tomorrow, and so forgive us for that. We've got White House VTC is always a possibility on Thursday, we've got some other moving parts. So if you could bear with us, my guess is we'll know by the end of the day. Would you agree with that? Fantastic. Again, everybody, thank you for coming out today and thanks for everything you're doing. Again, parks, both state and county opening at sunrise this Saturday, May 2nd. I'm begging you. Please be responsible. First of all,

enjoy some fresh air, the weather is apparently going to be very good this weekend. Enjoy some fresh air. But please, please stay away from each other. Please don't congregate. Please, you don't have to, but I'm asking you to wear a mask. I think if we have a good experience this weekend, and by the way, the golf protocols are many so please read the Executive Order to make sure you understand them. We didn't talk about golf much today but the protocols are significant, but it still allows you to play. Please adhere to the guidelines. And if you do, it'll be the first weekend, I hope, of many, many more to come where we're able to get out there and get some fresh air and enjoy a little bit of the extraordinary spring that we get every year in New Jersey. I want to thank Commissioner Judy Persichilli, Dr. Christina Tan, thank you both. Colonel Pat Callahan, Director Maples, Chief Counsel Matt Platkin, to the rest of the team, thank you and God bless you.

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