

Governor Phil Murphy

# TRANSCRIPT: August 7th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

08/7/2020

Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



**Governor Phil Murphy:** Apologies for being a few minutes behind. With me as usual, the woman who needs no introduction to my right, Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli. To her right, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, another familiar face, Dr. Ed Lifshitz; great to have you both. To my far left, Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Jared Maples from the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness. A particular treat today joined to my left by someone who needs no introduction, my partner in governing the great state of New Jersey, the Lieutenant Governor and the Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, the one and only Sheila Oliver. Great to have you with us, Sheila.

We have a lot of ground to cover today, so let's get right at it. First, the efforts to restore power from Tuesday's storm are ongoing. At current the last I got was 310,800 households remain without power. That's down from 1.4 million. We continue to push our electric utilities hard.

At one level you could say you've got progress of 1.1 million households since Tuesday are back in power, and that is progress. If you're one of the 310,800 and you don't have power, that is of no solace to you. I don't blame you for being upset and frustrated.

After each one of these storms we do a full after action postmortem, as it were. We will do that. JCP&L sticks out. They're good folks. I can't explain exactly why. It feels like each and every time we talk about their service area, they've got about 222,000 of those almost 311,000 are their customers.

I'm told a heavy dose in Monmouth County, which is where I am. Our power has come back on. It's frustrating



for folks, and I don't blame them. That does not take away from the fact this was a razor sharp, powerful storm that thank God came and went very quickly. Therefore, it left less collateral damage, less flooding, etc. than some other storms.

Certainly, a lot less than Sandy, but Sandy had 1,700,000ish outages. This was 1.4 million. It was in the same ballpark, but without, thank God, a lot of the collateral damage. There's no question it was a tough storm, but come on, folks, we've got to get people back up and get their power on.

I ask and remind everyone, I know Sheila joins me and Pat and his OEM capacity, make sure you're reaching out to elderly and vulnerable family members, friends, neighbors in particular. 211 is a good place to go for cooling centers and other information. Ready.nj.gov is the all-encompassing website. Again, if you're not back on and you're frustrated, we don't blame you.

I mentioned Sheila Oliver is with us. The Lieutenant Governor is here because we are proud to announce the creation of a new small landlord emergency grant program. For this program we are standing up \$25 million from the Coronavirus Relief Fund established through the Federal CARES Act. This program, which is authorized by the New Jersey Mortgage and Housing Finance Agency, will provide emergency grant funding to the owners of small rental apartment buildings between three and ten units to help cover their COVID-19 related rent losses from April through July. Landlords who receive assistance through this program must then pass along the benefits to their tenants by forgiving outstanding back rent and late fees accumulated during this same period. Sheila will get into some more detail.

We've set this up for really two main reasons. First, the majority of low and moderate income renters live in buildings between three and ten rental units. We know that by assisting small landlords we are helping to secure quality rental housing by protecting their investment in the maintenance of their properties. Many of these smaller buildings aren't just personal investments for their owners, they're also investments in neighborhoods in communities. Ensuring that responsible landlords are able to protect these investments and provide quality housing is of great importance.

Second, through this assistance we can help directly support COVID-impacted renters by having outstanding back rent forgiven, whether in part or in full, and reducing the risks for evictions once the statewide moratorium expires, which would be, by the way, two months after whenever the current public health emergency expires. As a reminder to all, and I know Sheila would want me to say this, and she will reiterate this, the eviction moratorium remains firmly in place, protecting tenants from being removed from their homes during the pandemic. Tenants for whom evictions have been filed may choose to participate in court mediation purely at their option. Choosing not to do so will not lead to eviction. Again, Sheila will speak to the small landlord program in greater detail. I thank her and her team in extraordinary leadership at the Department of Community Affairs as well as a shout out to Executive Director Chuck Richmond and the folks at HMFA for working together to get this grant program in place.

Looking ahead, we also know that folks will need the flexibility to pay back months of rent or mortgage payments when the moratorium lifts. We continue to work with our legislative partners to find a solution. I'm hopeful that I'll have a bill on my desk by the end of this month to get us there.

Next, let's switch gears. Judy is going to talk a fair amount about this. This is another one of our eye charts, Judy. This is a test your eyesight page. We're adding a new dashboard related entirely to our contact tracing efforts. This is added to the information available through our information hub at covid19.nj.gov.

This dashboard will allow everyone to see where our core of now 1,344 contact tracers is currently on the job as well as the latest available information on their efforts since COMCARE, the state's uniform data reporting system was launched last month. Remember, COMCARE is being used also by our neighbors, and that matters and helps us with cross-border tracing. Of our current contact tracers, 995 are public health workers already with local health departments. Then 349 more are members of the community contact tracing core who have completed their training at Rutgers School of Public Health. A total of 638 contact tracers have been hired through Rutgers School of Public Health; again, of that 638, 349 of them have completed their training.

Across the state there are currently 15 contact tracers on the ground for every 100,000 residents, and more will be added until every county hits that 15 per 100,000 threshold. Then we'll seek to double it. You may ask by when? My guess is by fall, end of year, in that timeframe. We're on our way to seeing these ranks keep growing.

From the work of our contact tracers, we are already seeing what works and where we need to work harder. According to the dashboard, 63% of those who are called by a contact tracer were successfully reached. Nearly half of all contacts were able to be notified of their exposure. That's good.

However, the greatest impediment to contact tracing has been for people not answering that important phone call or worse yet, refusing to assist our contact tracers. Among those who have tested positive for coronavirus and did answer, 45% refused to provide any contact information to our contact tracers. We need to be perfectly clear; this is about public health, period. No one is out on a witch hunt here. We do not condone things like underage drinking or any illegal behavior, but that is not what this is about.

No one is asking questions that have any focus than other than trying to stop the spread of the virus. This speaks directly to our need for greater education about the importance of answering the call of contact tracers and cooperating with them. Wednesday, Judy outlined the new public awareness campaign the Department of Health is undertaking to inform New Jerseyans of the vital need to answer the call and to work with our contact tracers to protect public health. Putting our community contact tracing core on the ground and providing the resources they need is only half of the equation. The other half is for you all to answer the call and help them so that together we can slow the spread of COVID-19 and to protect anyone who may have been exposed.

We will update the dashboard, Judy, every Friday. It will be a once a week update. Our contact tracers are on the frontlines of our pandemic response. I and we thank every single one of them for their commitment to the work ahead. Their work is vital to the health of our communities, and we will continue to work directly with our diverse communities so every resident knows the importance of the work our contact tracers are doing. Judy will be able to speak to the current statistics in greater detail in a few minutes.

Again, I know Judy will also mention this; we want to remind travelers to New Jersey as well as New Jerseyans who have traveled from an impacted state that a negative COVID-19 test result does not change the need for you to self-quarantine for 14 days upon arrival. We know that it can take days for the virus to present itself, meaning that you could have been exposed to and be carrying the virus, but just not yet at a level where a test would see it. Remember that, folks.

Switching gears yet again, I want to briefly touch on yesterday's report from the Department of Labor, which showed a more than 40% decrease in the number of initial unemployment claims. That's the lowest number we've seen since March and before the pandemic hit. While we certainly have a long way to go, this decrease does offer a glimmer of hope. Again, the data is compelling.

The decrease is nice, but if you're out there and you haven't gotten your check yet and you're frustrated, I don't blame you. I will almost certainly say it is overwhelmingly due to a very specific issue with the claim itself. Please bear with us, have patience, and we will get to you.

Since this emergency began, more than 1.3 million New Jerseyans have been deemed eligible for monetary benefits through the unemployment system, and 96% of them have received at least 1 payment. In total more than \$13.2 billion has been released into the pockets of New Jersey's families, including more than \$9 billion in federal pandemic unemployment compensation. However, with the expiration at the end of July of the additional \$600 federal weekly benefit, New Jersey families are now receiving that much less to make ends meet as this emergency continues.

It is unconscionable for Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell to decide that it was a better use of his time to go home last weekend rather than to stay in Washington and work across party lines and with the House of Representatives to renew this critical help. Critical days of work were lost for no good reason. Mitch McConnell may have forgotten that while he gets paid no matter what, millions of taxpayers who fund his salaries and their families are hurting and need help yesterday. Congress needs to get this done and to send it to the President for his signature.

While they're at it, Congress needs to provide direct assistance to states so that we are not left holding the bag just when our residents need us most to help lift ourselves back up off the mat. COVID-19 hasn't cared if it ravages a blue state or a red state, and neither should Congress. Governors have been clamoring for this help for months, and time is running short – governors, by the way, of both parties. Let's also get this done and get it done now so we can protect the jobs of the critical responders we need, our public health workers, our police and fire professionals, our educators, the women and men processing unemployment claims, among so many others. The clock is ticking, not just in New Jersey, but in state houses across the entire country.

I have had a good series of conversations in back and forth with Secretary of Treasury Steve Mnuchin over the past couple of days. He and I spoke last night. Please, let's all get into a room together. They have been doing that, but let's get this over the goal line. Whether you're unemployed, whether you're an educator trying to hold onto your job, whether you're a state that wants to keep the services going, for so many reasons we need Congress and the administration to find common ground, find it now, and get this done.

Finally, a quick note on schools; the Department of Education today has released the frequently asked questions, which we referred to at our briefing on Monday. That is now on the DOE website, which is at [nj.gov/education](http://nj.gov/education). Also, the Department of Agriculture will be releasing a memo clarifying that schools must continue to provide free and reduced meals to eligible students, whether the school days are shortened, the students are receiving virtual learning on a particular day, or individual students' parents or guardians have opted for all remote learning. In all areas, we continue working with and hearing feedback from everyone in our educational communities to ensure we have a fully informed reopening approach.

With that, Judy, I'm going to review the overnight numbers, if that's all right with you. Today we are reporting an additional 384 positive cases, cumulative total of 184,061 since March 4th. Positivity rate is back down below 2%, Judy; that's good news, 1.5%. Statewide rate of transmission is declining as well, currently at 1.15. The downward movement is a positive sign, but we cannot give up one inch. We need to get that at least below one. In our hospitals as of last night's reporting, there were a total of 551 patients being treated, 298 were COVID-confirmed, 253 listed as persons under investigation pending the return of a test. There were 120 patients in our ICUs and 73 ventilators are in use. This is, Judy, a significant increase from the prior days on ventilator use, right? And it speaks, again, to why no one – and we say no one – can have a cavalier attitude about this virus.

Today, we're reporting, sadly, another 12 deaths statewide confirmed from COVID-19 causes. So of these 12 – again, these are lab-confirmed – 7 have occurred in the past 4 days; four on August 5th, one on August 4th, and two on August 2nd. There were – again, apples and oranges – there were eight in-hospital deaths reported yesterday but again, those are still pending lab confirmation and are not included in these numbers. The total of COVID-confirmed deaths currently stands now – we've crossed 14,000, amazingly – 14,007 and the count of probable deaths remains at 1,853.

As we do every day, let's remember a few more of the New Jerseyans we have lost since COVID-19 began its march across our state. We begin by remembering Arnold Ingram. He grew up in Cranford before moving to Edison to raise his family. Arnold worked for AT&T in Piscataway and served as his colleagues' Communication Workers of America union representative. Although he retired to Deerfield Beach, Florida, New Jersey was never far from his heart, and he made the trip back as often as he could to visit family and friends or just to lend a hand to anyone who needed it. He had a passion for sports but particularly for golf, and he enjoyed his time off the course either on a cruise ship with his family or staying in shallower water to do some fishing and crabbing. He leaves behind his sons Brian, Jeff, and Eric, and their families including his daughter-in-law Andrea, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Wednesday, including – by the way, he also leaves behind five grandchildren, one of whom is Andrea's daughter Alyssa, and I had the honor of meeting both Andrea and Alyssa in May of 2017. Arnold also leaves behind his brother Kenneth. Arnold was 79 years old and God bless him, watch over him and his family.

Next, we honor Ridgewood's Brian Sadler. That is a picture. He was born in Staten Island but for the past roughly 30 years, New Jersey was his home. Brian spent his professional life as a healthcare professional starting back when he was still a teenager and first became a volunteer emergency medical technician. He received a degree in biology from Wagner College and would go on to spend 37 years as a paramedic. He was, by the way, one of the heroes who responded on 9/11. And only this past December, so only eight

months ago, he completed his training and exams to realize his dream of becoming a registered nurse, Judy, in the critical care unit of St. Joseph's Hospital in Wayne. I spoke with his wife, Debbie, and she said that this – it was a passion of his. He said I've spent too many years basically revising people, Sheila, or getting them to the hospital but I – he had this great passion to know what would happen on the other side when they got in the hospital. And ultimately, that probably cost him his life, sadly.

He may not have fit the stereotype, but Brian was a huge fan of heavy metal and would travel around the country with his wife, Deb, as I mentioned, his son, Tom, and sister, Lori, to attend any number of concerts and festivals. Brian also had a weak spot for Monty Python. Obviously he knew how to have some fun. Brian was only 60 years old. In addition to his wife, Deb, and his son, Tom, and his sister, Lori, he also leaves behind his daughter, Jessica, and his mother, Lois, and daughter-in-law, Amanda. And I have to say, if Lois is watching, God bless you. Lois has now lost two sons, which is unfathomable. We salute Brian's career of service to others and thank him and may God bless and watch over him. And in the spirit of his great passion for heavy metal, one of his favorite bands was Black Sabbath, particularly in the Ozzy Osborne era. So from 1975, I will quote, "All I have to give you is a love that never dies. A symptom of the universe is written in your eyes." God bless you, Brian.

And finally today, we remember Joseph Spina of Manchester Township, a graduate of Fairley Dickenson University, he worked for AT&T for 35 years and also served on the Board of Directors at the Atlantic Federal Credit Union for 47 years. But what set Joe apart was his 25-year commitment to raising money for the Multiple Sclerosis Society in memory of his beloved late wife, Grace, who was impacted by MS and passed away due to cancer in 2003 after 41 years of marriage: unbelievable. Joe was the capital of the Bike MS Team, Amazing Grace, named in her memory. And at age 66, he completed his first 100-mile ride. Along every mile, he rode for Grace. He was an inspiration to his family and friends. While he was off his bike, Joe kept busy with any number of other sports and activities: softball, tennis, bowling, bocce, tai chi, even ballroom dancing. He was also a member of the local Italian-American Club and participated in the Seaside Heights Columbus Day Parade, which he helped organize for his community.

And he loved spending time with his family. His daughter, Lori, with whom I had the great honor of speaking, wanted me to make sure I mentioned that he was the king of Jell-O molds, that that was one of his things, and that was one of the things he was known for. So Joe is now reunited with his Grace, and he leaves behind three children, one of whom is, as I mentioned, his daughter, Lori. He's got another daughter and a son. She's a schoolteacher, by the way, and the son is a volunteer fireman. He also leaves behind seven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. What a spirit we have lost. May God bless you, Joe, and watch over you and your family.

We have lost so many tremendous spirits over the past nearly five months, now more than 14,000. They each deserve to be honored and remembered, and that's exactly what we've tried to do with everything we've gotten together over these past few months. Before I close and turn things over to the Lieutenant Governor, I want to give our weekly update on our statewide progress in responding to the 2020 Census. Census workers have begun fanning out across New Jersey to knock on doors and ensure that everyone is properly and accurately counted. But there is still time for you to respond online or by phone by September 30th. Take a moment and go to [2020census.gov](https://2020census.gov) and respond today.

So far, 65% of New Jersey households have responded, and that's good, but we need to make sure everyone is properly counted so we can build the New Jersey we not only need but that which we deserve. Let's get every county well into the deep blue on this map. And a reminder to our proud immigrant communities, you count too, and we urge you to be counted. We know many immigrant communities are wary of completing the census because they fear their information may be shared with the federal government, but there are very strong protections in place. Responses to the 2020 Census are safe, secure, and protected by federal law, and they are important to ensuring New Jersey gets back the resources from Washington that we all deserve. We were way undercounted in 2010, folks. We cannot do that again in 2020. Your census responses cannot be used against you, folks, by any government agency or court in any way, and your personal data is safe and under federal code cannot be shared. So please go to [2020census.gov](https://2020census.gov) and be counted.

Now let's close today by recognizing another of the great small businesses that make our state a community. And today, we're going to visit Flemington, the county seat of Huntington County. That's where you'll find Victor Barner, his daughter Diane Ambrosia, and Pickwick Village Hallmark, which has been a borough staple since 1975 when Victor opened the store with his wife, Regina. That's Victor and Regina on the right and their daughter Diane on the left. And since 2000, Diane has been running Pickwick Village Hallmark. Being the center of a small town, they know most of their customers by name, and they also know there are their full-time and eight part-time employees would be hurt when COVID-19 forced them to temporarily close Pickwick Village Hallmark's doors. However, thanks to a grant from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority's small business emergency grant program, they were able to secure funds to help them make their payroll, pay their rent, and to keep the lights on. And when Diane reopened Pickwick's doors, most employees came back to rejoin her.

It's small business owners like Diane and her family who make our state what it is and who keep our economy moving. And it's people like her and her family who are going to help us create a stronger and more resilient New Jersey after the pandemic ends. I had a great chat with both Diane and her mom, Regina, on Wednesday, and they are doing a great job, and they stand for so much of our small business community. So to them and the whole team at Pickwick Village Hallmark, I can't wait to stop in and say hello next time I'm in Flemington and thank you for keeping the faith. And that goes, by the way, for all 9 million of you. We continue to work together as one family to beat the virus and right now, we need to dig a little bit deeper. I know we're all getting a little fatigued. Frankly, I am as well. But we cannot give coronavirus one more inch. Let's keep doing what we need to do to get our numbers back down and to get our restart and recovery back moving forward. I know we can do this, and I know that you know that as well.

So have a safe weekend, everyone. Keep wearing your masks. I was on the boardwalk in Seaside Heights, and I have to say, it isn't where it needs to be, Judy, but the mask compliance, compared to just two or three weeks ago, is dramatically improving. So folks, keep that up. I know it's a pain in the neck or a pain in the face, I guess, but keep at it. So have a safe weekend, keep wearing your masks, no house parties, please, Pat, and with that, I'll turn things over to another person who needs no introduction, my partner in government. I don't know where we would be without her, the Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, our Lieutenant Governor, the one, the only, the singular, Sheila Oliver.

**Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver:** Thank you, Governor Murphy, and I know I speak for all of the commissioners and the staff in your Cabinet. We thank you for continuing to inspire us to come up with the most innovative and creative things we can to continue to provide levels of service to our residents, and we're doing that. But you certainly are the inspiration.

The Governor has spoken about prioritizing our main streets across the state, and at the heart of many of our main streets are small landlords and their tenants. This is why I'm tremendously proud to be here today to announce the Small Landlord Emergency Grant Program, administered by the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency. HMFA's Small Landlord Emergency Grant Program is about supporting small residential property owners who are often the most vulnerable in an economic crisis because they are frequently locked out of access to capital and federal resources. The research that we have done shows that they are less likely to qualify for federal housing assistance as well as mortgage forbearance programs. That's why we're taking this extraordinary step today to help small landlords and the families that call these properties their home.

The program was specifically designed to help small landlords that own properties with from three to ten residential units with low to moderate level rents as defined by the Federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program. We will reimburse property owners whose tenants missed rent payments between April 2020 and July 2020 as a result of COVID-19 as a way of ensuring that their operating costs can be met. Our property owners have tax obligations, water and sewage obligations, mortgage payments in some instances, maintenance and upkeep of these properties, and this grand funding is available for up to four months of missed payments or partial payments that they may've received from their tenants.

Additionally, the landlord will be required to pass that benefit, as the Governor has reiterated, along to their tenants in the form of forgiven back rent and fees. In this way, we are aiming to ensure that both small landlords and their tenants benefit from this program. The number one priority of this program is to offer

much-needed relief to landlords and tenants who are fighting to stay afloat in the midst of the ongoing public health and economic crisis that we're all confronted with.

Our data also shows that many of New Jersey's small property owners, they're not companies or corporations. Rather, they're families and individuals and like the families they rent to, they are struggling as well. To ensure we help the families and individuals who own these properties, we have gone a step further and reserved one-third of the program funding for landlords who are registered in the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs RIMS database as individual or family owners.

While the Small Landlord Emergency Grant Program reimburses the landlords, the program is also a critical lifeline to working families and retirees who rent their homes. Approximately one out of every three renters in New Jersey lives in a three- to ten-unit property and nearly one out of every three low to moderate income renters live in three- to five-unit buildings as well. We understand that helping all families have access to safe and affordable housing is foundational to healthy, safe, and thriving neighborhoods. The Small Landlord Grant Program is not within HMFA's traditional scope, but as a housing agency under the leadership of Chuck Richman and his team, they saw the severe need and developed this innovative and creative program to assist in addressing it.

Our Administration's guiding principle is that no family should be without a home, especially in the midst of a pandemic. And that is why Governor Murphy took the extraordinary step of creating New Jersey's rent moratorium. You know that in DCA, one of the things we do is we oversee the Homelessness Management Information System, HMIS, and if the Governor had not created that moratorium, we would be having data coming out of our ears with the number of displaced people as we have now gained opportunity to create some programs to address this.

In my role as the Chair of the Housing Mortgage Finance Agency, I'm proud to announce this program with Governor Murphy, and Governor Murphy, I want to thank you for supporting us in creating this really creative model. I want to encourage all small landlords to go to the NJ HMFA website, [www.nj.gov/dca/hmfa](http://www.nj.gov/dca/hmfa) (<http://www.nj.gov/dca/hmfa>). Just remember those two words and you'll get there: DCA or HMFA. You'll be able to find out if you are eligible right there on our website. I also encourage landlords to begin preparing now so that they are ready to apply when the application period opens. There are several helpful resources available on the HMFA website and there's also a customer service hotline to answer any questions that you might have and to assist you with your own application.

As the Governor mentioned, the emergency grant program is also part of a sweeping, broad rescue package that the Murphy Administration has undertaken. And this program represents just one other rung on the ladder but there will be other ladders and rungs that we will climb toward. Our state and our people are dealing with a variety of challenges, so we're focused on offering a variety of solutions in an effort to reach as many people as we possibly can. Thank you, Governor Murphy for the creative vision you have demonstrated to pull New Jersey out of the pandemic. I want to thank Director Richman for his commitment to be bold and decisive and take action where it is needed to assure that New Jersey's small landlords and the families they rent to recover from these crises.

And in winding up, I'll just let you know that as the Governor mentioned, we are investing \$25 million. It will come from the Coronavirus Relief Fund as it was – as established under the Federal Coronavirus – I'm sorry, I'm trying to say Verizon but the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act. You know it as the CARES Act. And we're happy that we're able to serve the smallest mom-and-pop property owners. At least one-third of the program funds will be reserved for those applicants who are registered with DCA's Bureau of Housing Inspection as individual family rather than legally incorporated owners, the LLCs, etc. This is a grant program, and NJHMFA will not expect repayment of any of the funds that will be dispersed unless the agency determines or is made aware of the fact that information provided in the application was inaccurate or falsified.

And that kind of winds up what the program is about. We're very excited about it, and as we see the rollout of the program and the number of people that come forward to apply, it is our hope that within the department and our auxiliary agencies – New Jersey Redevelopment, NHMFA – that we would be able to collectively pool our resources to do much more of this kind of thing. Thank you, Governor.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Sheila, thank you. I don't know where we'd be without you, but this is the exact sort of program that goes right to the need. And again, it's a mom-and-pop need, as you rightfully point out. These are small – by definition of the program, they're small operations. They're overwhelmingly family-owned, and it is desperately needed. And I liked your analogy of another rung in the ladder of trying to build as much of a fairness back into things like landlords, tenants, small businesses. The folks have been crushed here. So bless you and thank you for not just this program but everything you do.

With that, again, I'll turn to my right, to the woman who needs to introduction. I'm flanked by two who need no introduction today. Please help me welcome the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon.

Our local and county health departments throughout the state have used contact tracing for literally decades to notify residents that they may have been exposed to a contagious disease like measles. The Community Contact Tracing Corps we've been building provides trained staff to support the tremendous work health departments have been doing in the field since this pandemic began. I want to thank all of them for their dedication to this effort. They worked quickly and in just over a month, they've trained, adapted to, and implemented the com-care platform at their agencies. Through their participation, we can collect data that can better inform the state's response.

The dashboard we are unveiling today provides information such as the percentage of cases successfully interviewed, those who provided contacts, and how many contacts were notified. The data currently shown will be – will cover the dates July 26th to August 1st. We will update the dashboard weekly. Over 60% of the cases have been successfully followed up with 44% of those contacted within 24 hours. Our goal is 100% within 24 hours. More than half of those individuals have provided contacts. As the Governor mentioned, we need to improve that number.

Forty-five percent of the cases are not providing details on their close contacts. In fact, they refuse. That means all those individuals don't know they were exposed to COVID-19 and could be infectious. These people could be your family, your loved ones, your friends, your coworkers who are unknowingly contributing to the spread of this virus in our state. In cases where contacts were provided, 48% of them were notified of their exposure. Twenty percent of the cases did not answer the call. It is vital that residents answer the call and participate to reduce the spread of COVID-19. A contact tracer will identify themselves as working with the local health department. If you are concerned that it is a scam, hang up, call your local health department, and verify that they are trying to reach you.

Please remember that all information will be kept confidential. Contact tracers will never ask for your Social Security number, financial information, or immigration status. We are increasing the number of contact tracers in our state with a current average of 15 contact tracers per 100,000 population statewide. The Department will prioritize assigning additional tracers to counties that need to reach that level if they have not already done so. Once all counties have reached this benchmark, an additional benchmark will be set at 30 contact tracers per 100,000 population. During this staffing scale-up period, disease progression is also being taken into account when directing where the contact tracers will be deployed. The ability to scale contact tracing capacity is crucial to break the chain of transmission, slow community spread, and restart our economy.

This week, we launched a statewide public education campaign about testing and contact tracing and why they're so important. Our hope is that with greater awareness of this vital public health tool, more residents will take the call and cooperate with our contact tracers. Local health departments have done a tremendous job in moving forward with our contact tracing efforts aided by additional contact tracers, and we thank all of those who have taken the call. What's needed is for everyone to share that responsibility in answering the call to help in this effort to shut down COVID-19. For each of us, for each other, for all of us, please, answer the call.

As the Governor mentioned, we also need travelers and residents returning to our state from heavily impacted states to cooperate with the 14-day quarantine to reduce transmission of the disease in our state. A test does not change the 14-day quarantine period requirement. We also encourage travelers to fill out the Department's electronic survey that collects information about where they are traveling from, their residence and destination so that we can follow through. We are currently receiving a little bit over a thousand surveys

daily. We need to receive more. The electronic survey is accessible by texting NJ Travel to the number 898211 or by visiting [covid19.nj.gov/njtravel](https://covid19.nj.gov/njtravel) or by scanning the QR code on posters that are placed at the airports.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, hospitals are reporting 551 hospitalizations with 120 individuals in critical care. Fortunately, there are no new reports of multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. Our total remains at 55. The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths reported today. In terms of deaths, the breakdown by race and ethnicity is as follows: white, 54.1; black, 18.3; Hispanic, 20.3; Asian, 5.5; and other, 1.8. As the Governor mentioned, of the 12 deaths we are reported today, 7 have occurred in August, 3 in July, and 2 in prior periods. Our hospitals reported 8 deaths in the 24-hour period ending at 10 PM last evening. Our veterans' homes, the numbers remain the same as they do at our psychiatric hospitals. The daily percent positivity, as of August 3rd, in New Jersey is 1.95%. The north is reporting 1.78; central, 1.52; and the south, 2.82.

I want to remind residents to continue to adhere to precautions to limit the spread of COVID-19. Practice social distancing, wear a face covering, wash your hands frequently, and use hand sanitizers that contain at least 60% alcohol. The Food and Drug Administration continues to warn consumers not to use alcohol-based hand sanitizers that contain methanol. Methanol or wood alcohol is a substance that can be toxic when absorbed through the skin or ingested. The agency has posted a do-not list of dangerous hand sanitizer products, which is being updated regularly. Visit [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov) (<http://www.fda.gov>) and search hand sanitizer for more information.

That concludes my daily report. Stay connected, stay safe, stay healthy, get tested, mask up, and for each other and for us all, please take the call. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Judy, well said. I mentioned earlier a spike in ventilator use, a number that we haven't seen in at least a week or so. I guess it's fair to say concerning but it's a reminder that we're not out of the woods, so that 73 people that are on a ventilator as we speak right now. But I guess I'd also add to that from yours or Ed's perspective, it's a one-day number. Let's see how that looks over a period of time, I assume, right?

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Yep.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** And then secondly, a pretty significant drop in the amount of hospitalizations and as far as I can see it, I think it's a bigger drop in the PUI number than the actual – some drop in the confirmed but the PUI – again, those are persons under investigation where they've taken a COVID test. The test is being processed, and so until they get the word back, they're considered in our numbers, right?

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** Or they are asymptomatic, have not – they're coming into the hospital maybe for an appendicitis, and they're asymptomatic, have not had an exposure to a COVID-19-positive individual. So we're refining along with the feds, the definition of PUI.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** I was going to say, we're all going through this together. The feds are doing the same and other states are obviously as well. It is notable that it's the sixth day in a row that we've had a lower rate of transmission. It's still not where we need it to be, but that's a good sign, so let's – folks, let's keep it that way. That clearly is on you. It's, to some extent, on policy by limiting the indoor gatherings. Folks, I hope we're beginning to get the message: no house parties indoors. A friend of mine was staying in a New Jersey hotel recently and they had to call the front desk and say listen, it's not on my floor but it's right below me. There's clearly a bunch of young people having a heck of a time in the hotel room. That's the last thing we need right now.

I want to correct a number I said earlier. Mahen corrects me. Sandy was 2.7 million outages, not 1.7 but 1.4 million, Pat, is still a big number and folks, if they're now down to 310-plus thousand not back with power and you're frustrated, we don't blame you. The one thing we do want to – I want to reiterate, Pat, before we turn things over to you to add more color on that or compliance or other matters, is we do respect with all the electric service providers that power has to be brought back on safely. So when I literally invariably sign a text or get off the phone with one of the CEOs, whether it's JCP&L, PSC&G, Ace, or our colleagues with Rockland and Orange, it is soon and safe. The extreme example of that is during the storm when you've got 50 to 70

mile and hour gusts. You can't put women and men up in buckets, but there's also the reality – and Joe Fiordaliso sent you and I a note yesterday, Pat, that you've got wires that are down and in some cases tangled inside of branches or trees and Joe told us of someone who was electrocuted I think in Rivervale yesterday.

So I do want to say that, that this has to be done safely. We don't want to put anyone, men, women who work for these electric service providers, any of the contractors they use, any out-of-state folks who come in and certainly residents. Please, please, please, let's do this carefully. For as much as our frustration gets high when we're not back on the grid, it does have – I have to reiterate, it has to be done safely and we respect the folks, the women and men who are out there doing that every day and to the residents, please don't – be really careful to – the green wire I saw in Jackson the other day, Sheila, you could barely see it because it was green and it's inside almost of a tree branch. It so happens in this case, they had de-energized it so it was harmless. But that's not going to be the case for the most part, so I want to make sure I say that. So Pat, with that long introduction, as always, thank you for everything. What do you got on power, compliance, and other topics?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Thank you, Governor, and good to have you here, Lieutenant Governor.

And I'll – just to echo the Governor's remarks with regard to the power outages, BPU and OEM, we monitor all of those restoration efforts. But to the point about doing it safely, we do have a flash-flood watch until 2 AM this Saturday morning in 14 of our 21 counties. There's expected to be some serious thunderstorms and heavy rains, which we are anticipating may hinder those restoration efforts. But to the Governor's point, we know that those service providers are trying to do it quickly and safely. We actually had a trooper responding to down wires yesterday in Millstone who was trapped in his car with live wires and a transformer on top of his troop car. But wisely, he did not get out of it and waited for the service providers in the town to show up and allow him to exit and get out of their effort. He is okay, yep, uninjured. So the danger is real and it can be deadly at time, tragically enough.

With regards to compliance, if you think back to May 31st when we had the civil unrest in a few of our cities across the state, yesterday the Atlantic City Police Department charged 81 individuals with regards to their behavior. Not only were they charged with riot and executive order violations, additional charges included burglary, theft, criminal mischief, possession of a weapon, receiving stolen property, and attempt of assault on law enforcement officer. That same evening in Trenton, if you recall, there was civil unrest and yesterday, the FBI filed federal charges against two additional individuals related to those May 31st riots in our capital city.

And lastly, I'll just add just a special note of thanks to our state emergency management partners. They include Department of Transportation, Board of Public Utilities, DEP, Human Services, Department of Health. Dating back to the entire response to COVID-19, whether working remotely or working at the State Emergency Operations Center at the Rock, the men and women of these state agencies, day in and day out, have dedicated themselves to the citizens of New Jersey. And to watch them pivot the few days ago as this tropical storm hit us was a tremendous source of pride and should be for everybody to see, not only what the return on our investment in partnerships are and relationship but just to see their commitment to all 9 million residents of this great state is just something that humbles me daily to watch two concurrent events come together and that we were poised and postured to deal with not only the pandemic but also with a tropical storm at the same time. I just thought it appropriate to recognize their efforts, Gov. Thank you.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Pat, thank you. We have not thanked you for everything in your personal leadership. We didn't spend a whole lot of time on it, but there were a couple of tornadoes in the south that just shredded a couple of communities, and that was also part of that. Let's also remember we saw yesterday that the projections for the hurricane season got worse, so I hate to even fathom this, but my guess is that this is – this storm, Isaisas, is one of many that we're going to have to deal with. And so that sustained leadership on behalf of all the OEM teams across the whole of government, not just at the state level but at county and local levels. We'll see more of that leadership, so thank you for all of that.

I think we'll start over here, Brendon. Before we do, Mahen, we'll be virtual this weekend as we have been for the past number and Monday, unless you hear otherwise, we'll be on at 1 o'clock here. The White House has indicated they're looking at something tentatively I think around 3 o'clock on Monday. So unless you hear

otherwise, 1 PM back here. Thank you.

Dustin, good afternoon.

**Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record:** Good afternoon. You said that the CARES Act money was already spent or earmarked for spending. Why hasn't there been any sort of public accounting for where that money's going besides some of these occasional announcements like the one you made today on the landlord program? With new details reported about what went wrong at the Paramus Veterans' Home, what's happening with the investigation you promised, and why was it not dealt with in the recommendations of the health report? There are concerns that the state-run facility didn't even follow the law you signed about nursing homes' ability to control infections, though there's been no accountability at the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs. And now that the decision on your plan to borrow \$10 billion is in the hands of the Supreme Court, what's your Plan B if the court rules against it? And from the press of Atlantic City, there was a police-involved shooting in Ventnor last night. Have the officers involved been placed on administrative duty or suspended? Thanks.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Thanks, Dustin. On the last one, I'm going to have no comment on that and when there's news to report, we will be back to you on that. But we mourn the loss of any loss of life. We mourn the loss of any life, pardon me.

I think only because the Supreme Court is deliberating, I won't comment on Plans A, B, or otherwise. But just to reiterate why we have taken the step that we have as it relates to borrowing, and that is particularly in the absence – and we remain dyed in the wool optimists, but we can see in Washington we're still a long way from getting the state aid that we need. So it magnifies the importance of why we took this step, which is to keep the folks in their positions at the frontlines, to keep the services strong. Again, an unprecedented fiscal crisis, again, compared only to the Great Depression in the '30s or the Civil War, and I reiterate that's why we've done this. I think while they're deliberating, I'll leave it at that and come back.

I'll go to the front-end of it. We've set up an office to do just what you've asked for. Dan Kelly is going to run it. He's putting his team together. I don't know any other state right now – perhaps there are others. I believe we were the first, if among the first to actually establish that office, and there will be a full accounting of every penny of federal money, without a question. You want to add anything to that, Matt?

**Chief Counsel Matt Platkin:** Yeah, within 90 days of the order, which was signed in the middle of July, I think July 17th, there has to be a website stood up for full transparency, which again to the Governor's point, would be remarkably fast. Every time we have a disbursement of federal funds, Coronavirus Relief funds, we announce it. What the Governor has said is we've presented a spending plan in the legislature but given the constantly changing regulations from the US Department of Treasury, the plans are plans, and we have to make sure that they run through the compliance process, are eligible expenses, and then once they're ready, the Governor and the rest of the Administration announces them.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** In fact, I mentioned I spoke to Secretary Mnuchin last night, had a good conversation with him, and I thank him for his efforts to try to get to a – his own efforts to try to get to common ground here. But in that conversation, interpretation still of the money that has come out of the CARES Act is still an item of discussion from their perspective. So listen, I get – you have a lot more pieces of paper than I do, but I get at least six pieces of paper every day that I bring with me. And the first three numbers I look at, literally, are 62, 81, 3, and those are the loss of lives in respectively Menlo Park, Paramus, Vineland Veterans Homes. God bless our veterans. God bless any loss of life but especially folks, by the way, on Purple Heart Day today, especially the loss of any veterans.

So we're still flying the plane. I mean, whether it's – Judy, the National Guard came in when, March 29th? That sound right to you?

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** National Guard came in March 28th.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** The 28th, the VA Undersecretary Wilkie came in April 15th. Thank God 62, 81, 3 has held for now a fairly significant amount of time. I don't have the exact date in front of me, but there will be a full accounting. There's no question about that. And there is some relevance in that report to any long-term care facility including veterans' homes. If we're going to save anybody – we're going to save everybody. If

we're going to save anybody, please God, we save our veterans. I would say this: especially Paramus and secondly Menlo Park, just given where they are but Paramus was literally probably at ground zero so of the whole virus itself, and we know that it now with the benefit of anecdotal as well as scientific evidence, it was in our midst in the New York metro area before any of us knew it. We know for sure that in long-term care facilities, either loved ones unwittingly with the virus or more often than not heroic staff persons who were coming and going – again from that community, it was exploding underneath our noses, and that's not just at the veterans' homes. That's at long-term care facilities not just in New Jersey, I might add: in America and sadly around the world. So there will be a full accounting, without question. Thank you for that.

Sir, anything? You're good? You got something? Please. Hold on one second.

**Reporter:** The primary was held one month ago, and the deadline for the counties to stop counting votes was two weeks ago, yet we have no results. The State Division of Elections has posted neither results nor turnout data. When can we expect this, and what does this say about the November election where the stakes are going to be very high? When will those contests be decided?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** You think the stakes are high in November?

**Reporter:** I would say they're pretty high.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Just checking.

**Reporter:** I would say they're pretty high. What is the status of the state's leases for the temporary morgues and field hospitals in the Meadowlands, New Jersey Convention Center, and Atlantic City Convention Center? Are these remaining open and is the state still paying for these? Mayors are complaining that they get little to no useful information from JCP&L and no updates on restorations of power, which was one of the biggest complaints during the previous outages. Has the state discussed this lack of communication with the utility companies? Also on reopening schools, we understand these decisions involve balancing multiple risk factors. Is vaccine compliance among the factors you are considering? A national think-tank has suggested low vaccine rates are connected to the lack of in-person schooling. Is there a way to ensure kids are getting vaccinated even if they are doing remote learning? And last but not least, a question from one of our viewers regarding the new landlord relief program. How do we know if our landlord is taking advantage of this program so we don't have to pay back-rent on top of them getting the program benefit?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** You sure you don't have anymore? You good? Okay, good. We have news on the primary election. The Secretary of State and the elections team within her auspices will post them. Does it impact November? It's too early to tell at this point, but we've learned a fair amount from it. And most of what we saw, we liked. Again, if anything, I think the physical in-person capacity was – undershot our aspirations and hope, which is why I've said now for several weeks, we want to make a decision, I would hope plus or minus by the middle of this month as to what November will look like.

The status of the field hospitals, Pat?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** They've been – I know for certain Secaucus – I'm pretty sure all three have been broken down. The Commissioner might even have more, but they remain in possession of the state of New Jersey. They are under our New Jersey task force. One is maintaining them and can be re-set up I think within 48 hours if a second wave comes back. And the more –

**Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli:** They're stored to be able to bring up, as Colonel said, in 48 hours.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** You were going to say something?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** Yeah, I think on the mortuary affairs, I do not – I think we've de-mobilized all of mortuary affairs, whether that was a fixed location or the 20 trailers. If that's not correct, I'll let you know before this ends.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Please God, we don't have to reactivate either of the field hospitals or certainly the morgue trailers.

On JCP&L, I have personally been involved or our team, at least with three mayors who were rightfully upset: Brad Cohen in East Brunswick, Mayor Mironov in East Windsor, Mayor Hornik in Marlboro, at a minimum. And as I say, we – I've already spoken to this, but we will do, as we always do, a post-mortem. Perhaps it due to be charitable to the nature of their system and the challenges with perhaps trees and whatnot, vegetation generally but two-thirds of the outages that as we sit here right now are still in the JCP&L region of service. And we don't pull any punches, trust me. We have very frank conversations that if we hear from a mayor, I personally in two of those three cases directed them to – connected JCP&L.

By the way, in many cases in our two and a half years together, Pat, you've been at my side on all these storms. It is both substance but it's also communication. Folks need to know, right, Sheila? They need to know a realistic, clear sense of what it looks like. I'll give you my own personal. We asked for some guidance at our own house I think at the end of the day Wednesday or Thursday morning and the general answer we got was you'll be back in service by Tuesday. In fact, we were back in service yesterday, so that doesn't – that was a pleasant surprise but you need – people need crisp communication.

I honestly either forgot or have no idea what your question was about schools and vaccinations. Brendon, can you come back? That may be on me, so I apologize.

**Reporter:** ...that one if you want. On reopening schools, we understand these decisions involve balancing multiple risk factors. Is vaccine compliance among the factors you are considering? A national think-tank has suggested low vaccine rates are connected to the lack of in-person schooling. Is there a way to ensure kids are getting vaccinated even if they are doing remote learning?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Yeah, I mean, we believe in vaccinations but beyond that, no news to break on schools and reopening related to vaccines or otherwise, but obviously we believe in it.

Sheila, how – what's the best way? Should they go to the website to get the answer to that question as to whether or not their landlord is part of the program?

**Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver:** Yes, you can go to the website. All of the eligibility criteria set forth, but I just want to put on the record that there is no program that we operate as state government that is exchange of money. We don't have extensive documentation and a landlord just cannot fill out his name and his address and say my tenants haven't paid me. there's going to have to be proof of that and in some instances, we will affirm that with the tenant to make sure there's no comeback. And that is why I – when I was describing with the app was like, I said that anyone who falsified or made misrepresentation in terms of the money their tenants may have given them, we send those right over to our Attorney General Guewal.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** And by the way, this is another program, Sheila, and you made this point and this program embodies it. A, personal responsibility, do the right thing and secondly, symmetry. If you're getting a break over here, we expect you to pass that break to folks over there so that you're not in some windfall of circumstance. So thank you for all those.

Brent, down to you, Mr. Matt.

**Matt Arco, Star-Ledger:** Why – on the [inaudible 1:05:09], why the major drop in hospitalizations? Is that the most we've seen in one day? That seemed like a lot. It was like more than 200.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Just before you go on, I believe it's a shift in the PUI number as we've been showing it now for the past month. You've got confirmed and persons under investigation. And Judy reminds me that includes asymptomatic who – someone who's going in for some other procedure, and it looks to me like there was some drop in the COVID-19 confirmed but a far bigger drop in PUIs. Is that fair? Please.

**Matt Arco, Star-Ledger:** Okay, today, we heard from a lot of readers. State Assemblyman Erik Peterson said during a hearing this morning that you will – he said today but maybe soon will announce that schools will remain all remote until January. Then the state would reevaluate it month-to-month after that. Obviously he didn't announce that today, but is that something you are considering and can you provide assurance to families worried about in-person classes being canceled? What is your personal assessment of JCP&L this week, and would you support daily fines for power companies that fail to make the grade during storms? Aside from house parties, are there other instances where contact tracing is showing the disease spreading? Will your Administration disclose where and when they are occurring and how you come to those

conclusions? And will you release contact tracing data on the house parties? And is there a bottleneck in actually deploying trained contact tracers or some other issues since only 349 have been deployed? And then from – do you, Governor, personally think the NRA should be dissolved? And this is from Karen Yate: will the state distribute PPE from its stockpile to school districts? Districts have also said they cannot get Plexiglas and disinfecting wipes because of a huge backlog. How is the state helping school get the supplies they need to reopen safely?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Okay, so we addressed the hospitalization, I believe, and if there's any more color, Judy can jump in. I did not see Erik Peterson's comments, but we literally have no news on education today other than we posted the frequently asked questions.

Listen, the JCP&L, both their in-state leadership, Jim Fakult and his team, as well as Chuck Jones, because they're part of First Energy based in Ohio, we have a very constructive – I think Pat would – and Joe Fiordaliso would agree. We have a very constructive relationship with them. And we do a post-mortem after each one of these storms. I'm not sure about fines because as I said earlier and Pat mentioned, we got, for instance, a flash flood warning in place until the wee hours of tomorrow, and that may impact any one of these providers' ability to actually do the work they need to do. So as I mentioned earlier, we have to keep in mind safety here as well. But we let our concerns be known quite clearly. Again, we've got a good open relationship with them, with Dave Daley and PSE&G and Dave Velasquez at ACE and the folks at Rockland and Orange. But again, we just got a – we need more. I don't know if it's – you do have another factor here, which is the pandemic and bringing – the difficulty in bringing in out-of-state crews, which they've done – all of the providers have done a fair amount of but they haven't been able to configure as normal. That's just some quick sense.

Judy, any color – let me just hit NRA. I'm not – as you can imagine, I got an F from the NRA. It's the only F I've ever gotten that I'm proud of. Pat, by the way, has a gun on him, so – but it's the only F I've ever been proud of. I just don't think they do it justice in terms of gun safety in our country. If you look at just as a – the American public, forget Democrats and Republicans, the American public and how they feel about comprehensive background checks, it's in the mid- to high 80 percents and yet Congress has never been able to act on that. And that's the NRA's – the blood is on their hands.

Judy, contact tracing, the web – the dashboard, rather, will give us some sense of the wheres and whens. I've heard less about house parties the past 48 hours, but that's anecdotal. But Ed, any sense as to where – any gems in terms of geographic or other types of behavior that's being uncovered as we speak?

**Department of Health Medical Director Dr. Edward Lifshitz:** Nothing dramatic or specific right now or like that Jackson house party from a couple of weeks ago. Certainly we continue to hear things that trickle in from different places about different things but nothing I would bring to attention, no.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** In terms of – I wouldn't say it as bottlenecks. We wanted to get to 15 per 100,000 as a first pass. Judy and I have both mentioned our next wave is going to get to 30 per 100,000, which when you do the math is about 2700 people, and we're on course to get there. So I don't think that is the issue. The issue is – and maybe this is what you meant. The issue is people aren't answering the phone or not answering the questions when we ask them. And those have been anecdotally at least skewed heavily toward house parties that involve minors. That would be my strong sense of that.

PPE, Pat, anything you want to add on school district PPE-related matters?

**State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan:** What we committed to is, if you recall back in March when we pulled from the 600-plus school districts through the county OEMs, the memorandum that I put out to them that whatever we took from them that we would replenish them completely but beyond that, we are asking the districts to be on their own and just like any other disaster, local, the county, the state – if it comes that we need to tap into the state stockpile, I would say that we would be here for them. But right now, we're asking that the districts beyond what we've replenished them that they go through their normal procurement procedures, which we all know are a challenge across the entire globe.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Yep, amen. So thank you for that.

Nikita?

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** Hi, Governor. So since last we spoke, both Senate President Steve Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin have signaled support for early voting. I'm wondering if you've spoken with them on the issue and whose taking the lead on it? I know you said last time that you needed a bill. Also, do you think there's any chance that early voting will be done in time for this year's general election? Past that, having a good amount of primary data now, have you reached a decision on whether organizational lines should exist? And lastly –

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Organizational what? I'm sorry.

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** I'm sorry, say that again?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Organizational lines?

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** Should exist.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Should exist.

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** Yeah, do you believe they should, basically? And when did you last speak with Vice-President Biden and have you two talked about COVID spikes or his Vice-Presidential pick?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** When did I speak to him and about COVID spikes?

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** Have you – when did you last speak with him and have you spoken to him about COVID spikes or his Vice-Presidential pick?

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Or.

**Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe:** Yes.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** Okay. It's been a number of weeks, but we speak to his people all the time and I literally mean that, so whether it's Ron Clane or Jake Sullivan, others in his group. I've not spoken about – when I spoke to him, it was all about coronavirus. I've not had any conversations with him about the Vice-President, which I assume is imminent.

Got nothing new on organizational lines and I don't think the – either the coronavirus, COVID-19, nor the form of the election we took is either positive or dispositive toward that at the moment. But nothing to report there.

I'm a big fan of early voting in general, and I've had conversations, without question, over the past several years with both the Senate President and the Speaker. I like it a lot. I've said the reason I like it, again, is you don't put all your marbles into one day if NJ Transit has a bad day or the weather is lousy, and then you add to that a public health emergency and the ability to space out any in-person voting is another attraction. I don't know, Matt. Is there anything boiling out there in terms of actual legislative activities and if it were to come to pass before the election in November I would – as a general matter without commenting on a specific bill, I suspect Sheila would join me in this regard, would be very supportive of that.

**Chief Counsel Matt Platkin:** There's been a number of conversations with the legislature on it and the only challenge with implementation is early voting requires electronic poll books. There's a procurement challenge in doing that between August and November, but we're certainly open to any ideas the legislature has on this that expands access to the ballot, particularly during a public health emergency.

**Governor Phil Murphy:** It's also something we haven't had a whole lot of – in our deliberations over the past several years. There hasn't been a whole lot of disagreement about it, either. So I think the time is now and I'm glad you raise it because it gives us a chance to repeat and again, I take my hat off for both the Senate President and the Speaker for their support on this. I think it'd be a good thing for the home team at many levels.

I'm going to have a quick sip and then mask up, Judy. That was water, by the way. Sheila, you were wondering, I know. Thank you to everybody. Let me begin by thanking Judy and Ed, as always, Pat, Jared, Matt, Mahen, and the whole team, and a particular thanks and particular treat to have the Lieutenant Governor here, so Sheila, thank you for your being with us and your leadership. Again, we'll be virtual tomorrow and Sunday and unless you hear otherwise, Mahen will be here at 1 o'clock on Monday. Lots of moving parts. I mean, I can't emphasize enough the resolution in Washington on everything from unemployment benefits all the way over

to state – direct state aid is hugely needed. So we are pleading with leadership from both house, both sides of the aisle, the White House, to get to that proverbial room and get something meaningful done. If it's good for New Jersey, it's good for America.

Again, it's Purple Heart Day, so to every one of our veterans or active service members who have received, both with us and those who have gone before us, we salute you and all veterans and members – active duty members of our armed services. To each and every one of you, thank you for everything you have been doing.

Most, not all, but most of the numbers this week have started to go in a direction we need them to go, Judy and Ed. We need folks to continue. That's not something that happens by accident. It's not something that gets done in a laboratory. You all are getting that done. Please keep it up, the face coverings, no house parties, social distancing, washing hands with soap and water, staying away if you don't feel well, get tested. If you've been out of state, Judy, to one of those states or you're visiting from those states, self-quarantine, please.

Testing turnaround times is still unacceptably long as a national matter. We're not immune to that. It's coming a little bit better than it was, say, a week or ten days ago, not where it needs to be, but that's not a reason to not get tested. Get tested. And again, to each and every one of you, God bless you and thank you.

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## News & Events

Press Releases ([/governor/news/news/562022/approved/news\\_archive.shtml](/governor/news/news/562022/approved/news_archive.shtml))

Photos (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/govmurphy>)

Public Addresses (</governor/news/addresses>)

Executive Orders ([/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo\\_archive.html](/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html))

Administrative Orders ([/governor/news/ao/approved/ao\\_archive.shtml](/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml))

Direct Appointments (</governor/news/appointments>)

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Statements on Legislation

([/governor/news/statements/approved/statements\\_archive.shtml](/governor/news/statements/approved/statements_archive.shtml))

Administration Reports (</governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml>)

Transition Reports ([/governor/news/reports/approved/reports\\_archive.shtml](/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml))

Press Kits (</governor/news/press>)

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