



MESSAGE

FROM MAYOR DAN GELBER

This morning, Friday April 3, the State Department of Health has reported that COVID-19 cases in Miami-Dade County surpassed 3,000 and 24 people in our County have now succumbed to the virus. To give you a sense of where we are in this fight, these charts reflect just the last week. While I believe the County numbers are reliable I'm not sure the City ones are--but the trajectory definitely is. Of course, these are only cases with positive test results and testing has been severely limited so it is very likely that the actual numbers are substantially higher by multiples.

The point is, we can see very clearly the direction this is headed-- but our collective efforts to stay at home, practice social distancing and conscientiously follow all guidelines can bend this curve considerably. If we sweat the details of what is expected of all of us we can change this trajectory.

With regard to guidelines, the CDC is expected to announce that they believe cloth face coverings -- even homemade ones -- provide a valuable bulwark against the spread of the virus -- so our City Manager will soon sign an order requiring -- not suggesting -- but requiring that workers and customers in certain businesses -- including food stores, restaurants, and pharmacies -- must be wearing a face covering by Monday evening. The order will follow CDC guidelines, which recommend homemade coverings including bandanas and scarves. So please make arrangements -- there are innumerable ways to comply without needing to purchase medical grade masks which candidly are best reserved for health care workers. Use the weekend to make some at home or just locate scarves and bandanas that might suffice. Remember, these masks reduce risk to others but don't obviously eliminate it -- so please continue to observe social distancing and others measures to keep you and your loved ones safe.

Yesterday, a testing facility opened up on Collins Avenue. Again, it is not a City-run operation -- but we are supporting it so that it is able to serve our community. Do not drive up at-will or walk up -- it is by appointment only. Thanks to Commissioner Meiner who spearheaded this effort along with City Staff.

Also, yesterday our City sponsored a Webinar on certain new federal benefits that are available through the recent stimulus package from the Congress. One of those programs: the Paycheck Protection Program -- starts today and if you own a small business of under 500 employees I urge you to very quickly assess whether you should apply. The program -- in a nutshell -- allows almost any small business to receive a check from the government equal to 250% of your monthly payroll. Although it starts as a loan -- if you spend the money on payroll and some other defined costs of your business -- the entirety of the loan is forgiven making it a grant to your business. The program includes regular employees, 1099 employees, and will even consider tips and commissions, and even allow you to rehire furloughed workers so its perfect for our hospitality industry. The reason I urge you to do it quickly, is that although it is a \$350 billion program -- the funds will go fast and today is the first day you can actually apply. Our City website has lots of information on how to access it and you can view our one-hour webinar anytime. On Monday we will be hosting a webinar on the same program specifically for local not for profits and our arts and cultural institutions as many of them will qualify as well. Thanks to U.S. Senator Marco Rubio for his efforts to secure this benefit.

So I wanted to talk for a moment about the blizzard of orders and directions that are coming at you seemingly from every corner of government. Our City, the County, the State and of course the federal government all seem to be blaring at you with directions that sometimes seem different and even conflicting.

Let's step back for a moment and put these in context so we can navigate them. All these governments have certain powers that they can deploy -- some emergency powers are independent of anyone else, and others require declarations and actions from elsewhere.

Obviously we have been acting well ahead of the other local governments in our state ... not because we are smarter or better -- but because we need to. Not all cities have beautiful beaches -- or promenades like Ocean Drive and Lincoln Road -- or a superb hospitality industry with amazing restaurants everywhere. Or golf courses and parks like ours. And because of these amenities and others -- we tend to be a communal City and we attract people who want to gather together. In other words we typically are not very good at social distancing.

That is why we so quickly implemented a safer at home directive and closed so many of the amenities we love. And why we immediately turn suggestions -- like wearing masks -- into obligations.

Wednesday's order from the Governor directing all residents in Florida to stay at home was not nearly as rigorous as the one implemented in our City earlier last month -- as the Governor explained, his order is a "baseline" for the entire state -- but he recognized that local communities are free to implement more exacting rules -- so, yes, ours is more rigorous but it needs to be followed as well.

We know we will likely be in this for at least this month for sure -- and I recognize it is much more than just an inconvenience. These measures will feel especially acute as this weekend marks Palm Sunday and important holidays for various faiths are right around the corner -- times when we traditionally gather to celebrate with friends and family. But for our community it is especially important we retrain ourselves -- even if just temporarily -- to follow all these directions. I know some of them feel they are imposing if not onerous, but they are critical and will, ultimately, save lives if we all do our part.

So thanks for your calm and patience. And stay healthy and at home.