

Northern Virginia Coalition for a Safe Re-Opening

We call on Governor Northam, as a healthcare practitioner, to acknowledge the disparate impacts a premature state reopening would have on vulnerable Virginians. To date, this virus has disproportionately impacted Black and Latinx Virginians, especially those who are frontline workers. A plan for reopening must acknowledge the devastation to these communities and provide a way to protect them. As the incidence of COVID-19 cases and deaths rises, we are witnessing that the Black community is experiencing the worst outcomes of this pandemic. In almost every location reporting data, African Americans are harmed--both in infections and fatalities--in higher percentages.

Due to [limited available testing for coronavirus](#), actual case numbers are likely to be underreported and have shown to place already vulnerable communities at increased risk of severe illness or death under loosened public health guidance. [As hospitalization rates have not stabilized, testing availability remains limited or scarce, and COVID-19 related deaths continue to rise](#), the urgency to reopen the state does not place families or working Virginians at the center of an economic and health equity plan. Instead, a rushed reopening without having met any of the initial CDC recommended metrics demonstrating a 14-day consistent downward trend in cases runs counter to [expert public safety and public health policies](#).

According to [data provided by the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association](#), as of mid-April, current hospitalizations of COVID-19 patients in Virginia increased by roughly 20 percent from 1,296 to 1,566 people and have yet to stabilize as new confirmed cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are reported daily. Not only would a premature reopening of the state undermine efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, but the devastating implications for a surge or “second wave” of cases across Virginia places our essential workers and healthcare workers at greater risk of contraction. In fact, Black and Latinx communities have comprised a disproportionate amount of virus contractions and COVID-related deaths. In Fairfax County, Latinxs make up close to [60 percent of the county’s COVID-19 cases](#), a rate more than three times their share of the population.

Black, Latinx, and immigrant communities comprise a large share of the country’s essential workforce. [Data provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) shows that Black and Latinx workers are less likely to access remote and telework benefits that subject them to greater risk or over-exposure to the virus. [A recent Brookings study](#) shows that Black people are more likely to be a part of our nationwide frontline workforce representing nearly 30 percent of bus drivers, roughly 20 percent of all food service workers, janitors, cashiers, and stockers. And [nearly 30,000 frontline healthcare workers](#) across the nation are DACA recipients representing immigrant communities.

Millions of Virginians from communities of color face irreparable damage under an expedited reopening plan that serves business interests more than the interests of the residents of this Commonwealth. Governor Northam must act to prioritize the health and safety of Virginia’s workforce in order to pave a successful financial recovery that will not compromise workers and vulnerable communities. We demand careful reconsideration of any notion of reopening Virginia until streamlined, aggressive testing and contact-tracing operations are developed and in place so that new cases can be isolated. Furthermore, we demand an evidence-driven economic

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recovery plan rooted in public health best practices that will protect all Virginia families and essential workers. Governor Northam's plan must include:

- Requirement of all workplaces to provide PPE for their employees and workers, regardless of workplace size and arrangements, including private homes and domestic workers.
- All Virginia workers who cannot telework and must go to work should have increased protections and pay that includes:
 - hazard pay, which is additional pay on top of the workers' base pay;
 - strong workplace protections, including whistleblower and employer retaliation protection.
 - provision of PPE
 - paid time off (sick days and family leave) after they return to work
 - support for workers' child care and other care responsibilities.
- All employers must provide emergency paid sick leave and paid family leave.
- Extended student loan repayment protections.
- Paycheck protection extended to formerly incarcerated people.
- Cash relief for immigrant families, including undocumented and mixed status families who are left out of federal cash payments. .
- Ensure that all COVID-19 testing and treatments are free and readily available to everyone regardless of insurance status, language, race, country of origin or immigration status.
- Provide free reliable and multilingual telecommunication tools that must be made available for residents to access local doctors and medical professionals.
- Guarantee that there will be no immigration status check at COVID-19 related testing or treatment.
- No cooperation with federal immigration authorities for immigration enforcement during the COVID pandemic.
- Robust testing sites must be established in predominantly Black and immigrant communities. In these communities widespread and sufficient testing should be done until the positive test result rate is below 10%. This is a standard that has been used internationally and has been referenced previously by Governor Northam to include but not be limited to:
 - 1) Non-hospital facilities where residents found to be positive can isolate themselves comfortably with support.
 - 2) Extensive contact tracing capacity.
 - 3) Additional free medical services will be set up in connection with the sites or existing community medicine facilities.
 - 4) Social Services and Health liaison to connect Virginians to income support, family resources and health insurance.

Signed,

Arlington NAACP
CASA
Care in Action

Fairfax NAACP
Loudoun NAACP
New Virginia Majority

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Prince William County NAACP
Richmond for All
Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations
(VACOLAO)
Virginia Student Power Network