



State of New Jersey

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TO: All Department of Law and Public Safety Employees

FROM: Gurbir S. Grewal, Attorney General

DATE: March 16, 2020

SUBJECT: Important Message from AG Grewal Regarding COVID-19

Dear Colleagues:

As our Department responds to the COVID-19 outbreak, we have two overarching goals: to ensure the health and wellbeing of our 7,700 employees, and to protect our fellow residents during an unprecedented public health emergency.

Let's face it: we're not a private corporation, and we don't have the luxury of completely shutting down our operations at a time like this. We must continue serving the public, no matter what is happening elsewhere in the state. But there are a number of precautions we can take, and I am confident that we can carry out our public safety responsibilities without putting our employees at risk.

Today, we are implementing a three-pronged plan to keep our employees safe. The plan is designed to:

- (1) **Reduce the number of employees in our offices**, by allowing Divisions to temporarily implement work-from-home policies;
- (2) **Reduce in-person interactions**, both with members of the public and with other Department employees; and
- (3) **Expand cleaning services in all Department offices**, especially in high-use common areas.

These policies build on several initiatives we have launched over the last several weeks. Taken together, they reflect an aggressive effort to ensure the safety of our colleagues.

Reducing the Number of Employees in Our Offices

Public health experts agree that one of the best ways to stop the spread of COVID-19 is through "social distancing," or the intentional reduction of close contact between people. And while we cannot



fully close our offices, we can at least reduce the number of employees coming to the office each day by temporarily implementing the use of telecommuting, which mitigates the risk both for those who stay home and the smaller group of employees who still must come to work.

Until recently, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) did not permit State agencies to implement telecommuting or other work-from-home programs for their employees. In the last few days, however, CSC and the Governor's Office have temporarily allowed agencies to authorize these programs. As a result, effective immediately, we are adopting the following policy:

- **Telecommuting.** Each LPS Division is permitted to establish its own work-from-home protocols, taking into account the Division's needs and technological capabilities. Division Directors will have the discretion to approve work-from-home requests until the end of the public health emergency.

It goes without saying that our Department has never attempted telecommuting on such a wide scale, and it will take some time to implement this policy across all Divisions. Later today, we will provide additional information about telecommuting, both in an LPS announcement and on the Department's intranet page.

Reducing In-Person Interactions

We are also instituting a number of short-term measures to limit in-person interactions for those who still must come into the office. These policies are designed to reduce in-person contact with both fellow employees and members of the public who seek services from our Department.

- **Travel.** Effective immediately, we are suspending all non-discretionary work-related travel, both for events in state and out of state. Exceptions to this policy must be approved by your Division Director and the Office of Attorney General, and will only be approved for mandatory travel, such travel required by law or court order, or as part of an ongoing civil or criminal investigation.
- **In-person trainings.** Effective immediately, we are suspending all in-person trainings, including those offered from the Attorney General's Advocacy Institute (AGAI). Trainings will be either reconstituted as online trainings or rescheduled as in-person trainings at another date to be determined. LPS attorneys are eligible to receive no-cost online programs through the Practicing Law Institute (PLI), and may create an account by emailing Sandra.Angellella@njoag.gov.
- **In-person Department events.** Effective immediately, we are suspending all discretionary Departmental events. This applies to LPS employee resource groups (ERGs), lunch hour "brown bags," and other voluntary educational sessions.
- **Internal meetings.** Effective immediately, Divisions may no longer hold any in-person meetings, and must instead use teleconference and videoconference capabilities. Employees who lack such capabilities should notify their supervisors, who can work with the Division of Administration to identify IT needs. Exceptions to this policy must be approved by your Division Director and the Office of Attorney General.

- **Congregating in public spaces.** We also encourage employees to avoid congregating in crowded public areas, such as the building lobby or cafeteria. Employees should consider eating their lunches at their workstations.
- **Public interactions.** We are currently taking steps to limit the need for in-person interactions with the public. For example, a number of our Divisions issue permits and licenses to members of the public, and we are working to temporarily suspend in-person renewals until the end of the public health emergency.

Common Sense Measures and Best Practices

In addition, we encourage employees to use common sense in preventing the spread of COVID-19. Avoid handshakes, keep your distance from other employees, and wash your hands frequently. If you are feeling sick, stay home and seek medical advice as necessary. If you think you may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, stay home, follow the Centers for Disease Control's guidance (included at the bottom of this email), and contact our Human Resource office immediately. For any questions about sick leave policies, contact:

Valerie Stutesman, Director of Human Resources, Valerie.Stutesman@njoag.gov
Danielle Amari, Deputy Director of Human Resources, Danielle.Amari@njoag.gov
General HR questions on COVID-19: HRCOVID19@njoag.gov

Expanding Cleaning Services in all Department Offices

Finally, our Facilities unit is expanding cleaning services throughout the Department. Building cleaners will focus in particular on high-use surfaces and public areas, including bathrooms, elevators, and door handles. We are also working to ensure access to basic sanitation items, such as paper towels in all bathrooms and hand sanitizer dispensers in public areas.

Additional Resources

Below are some additional resources for those with questions.

- NJ DOH COVID-19 homepage: <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/ncov.shtml>
- NJ DOH Social Distancing: <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/NCOV/COVID-19-SocialDistancing.pdf>
- CDC COVID-19, knowing the symptoms: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/symptoms.html>
- CDC COVID-19, steps to prevent illness: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Fprevention-treatment.html
- NJ Civil Service Commission COVID-19 guidelines and FAQ: <https://www.nj.gov/csc/employees/covid.html>

- Confidential and free counseling services, through the Office of Employee & Organization Development: <https://www.state.nj.us/njsp/oed/>

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We know this is a stressful time, and we're grateful for your continued public service. In the days to come, we will continue to keep each of you apprised with the most up-to-date information by email and/or through our phone message system. Please be safe!

Gurbir