



## THE BOROUGH OF RIDGWAY

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May 20, 2020

Office of the Governor  
508 Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf:

A group of elected officials from Elk County submitted a letter to your office on Thursday, May 14. The letter sought specific information about the data metrics you are using to determine when counties can move into the green phase of your Process to Reopen Pennsylvania. Neither you nor your representatives have responded. Now, a larger group of elected officials from the Northcentral and Northwest regions are submitting this letter to make a final plea for open and honest collaboration.

You have repeatedly argued that your plan is based on data and science, but on April 23, three weeks ago, you stated that “ultimately there’s going to be a measure of subjectivity to this whole thing.” Just last week, Dr. Rachel Levine told reporters that, ““We have not determined that type of criteria at all. In fact, we haven’t really determined the criteria to go from yellow to green.”

We understand that managing a crisis is difficult, but this is unacceptable. You promised a process based on data and metrics. You promised transparency and accountability. Instead, three weeks later, we are told that there is no plan to get from yellow to green, and our respectful requests to review the metrics and work collaboratively have gone unanswered directly by you.

On our own volition we found Carnegie Mellon University’s Risk-Based Decision Support Tool, dated May 12, 2020, which you have cited as crucial to your decision-making process. It offers some data worth reviewing. Across the Northwest and Northcentral regions there are two clear risk factors that we need to address: ICU Capacity Risk and Re-Opening Contact Risk.

As we addressed in our letter dated May 13, 2020, the hospitals in our region have not been stressed by COVID-19. There is excess capacity at our regional providers. They can handle an uptick of cases where an ICU and equipment are needed, and so can the tertiary hospitals to which they refer. Instead, our hospitals are today threatened by the very lockdown you proposed to save them. We do not criticize that aspect of your order, but it is now imperative that you change your orders based on changing realities in our community. This now leads to addressing the Re-Opening Contact Risk index.

According to the report, it is defined as, “percentage of workers in an area employed in currently ‘physically closed’ industry sectors. We would be shocked if this were the metric keeping us from transitioning to green. First, none of these “physically closed industry sectors’ are closed because of COVID-19’s deadly nature. Rather, these sectors are closed due to direct orders from your office. It would appear, then, that we cannot transition to green because too many of our businesses are physically closed, but of course we cannot open them until you transition us to green. Our citizens deserve better

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than this kind of regulatory Catch-22. If you are waiting for this metric to trend downward, it clearly cannot until you change your order.

Moreover, the concern over this index appears to be based on the idea that opening would put workers into contact with more people, with whom they have NOT had contact throughout the lockdown. Again, let us analyze the data. This time, focus on Elk County. According to the PA Department of Labor and Industry's 2019 3Q report about the county's top 50 employers, numbers 5, 28, 31 and 36 are all schools. Counted together, schools are easily in the top 3 employers, and quite possibly number 1.

You will note, of course, that schools are physically closed due to a separate order from your office. These institutions would NOT reopen in an immediate transition to green. Moreover, we are about to experience summer. So even if the county were to go green right now, the "re-opening contact risk" associated with school employees would not actually be a risk at all until school resumes in the fall.

Another high risk factor across many Northwest and Northcentral counties on this report was "Population Age Risk," or the percentage of people in the county older than 60. This is yet ANOTHER metric that is impossible to trend downward in anything except the longest term. Pennsylvania has the ninth highest median age of all states, meaning that there are 47 other states and US territories that are younger than Pennsylvanians. In fact, we suspect it will get worse; we cannot be sure what happens in Philadelphia, but in Elk County all of our residents get older every day.

If these are the metrics that are holding us back from transitioning to green, we urge you to announce, today, that we will complete that transition to green immediately. If your administration cannot process such a transition that quickly, we petition you to announce that our communities, or some subset of them, will be transitioned to green this Friday, May 22. If any cannot transition, we are formally requesting that you tell us specifically which metrics are holding us back, and what targets we need to hit on those metrics to proceed.

"Subjective" is no longer good enough.

Perhaps you will respond that these are not the important metrics to analyze. We did not put them in the report, but fair enough. Please point us to the ones we should be analyzing. Hopefully, they will be metrics that are possible for us to impact in some material way. We are committed to working with you to do that.

Other areas of the state have taken a more combative approach, threatening lawsuits and nonenforcement. We have resisted calls to do the same from frustrated citizens, instead offering to help you craft a plan that is responsive to local needs. The failure to release the relevant metrics makes our residents fear that your plan is arbitrary rather than data-based. They fear that your threat to enforce compliance by defunding communities that ask questions is capricious.

You have the power to put those concerns to rest: Share the metrics. Share the data.

We are fortunate that COVID-19 has impacted our region less than anywhere in the state. Maybe there are more hurdles for us to clear before we take the next step. Many of us feel that we are ready now, and pressure mounts for us to continue loosening restrictions. Whether that happens today, tomorrow, or a week from now, the only way to tackle the questions and give our communities the answers they deserve is to bring local leaders into the process.

We trust that you will receive this offer in the spirit in which it is offered. At the same time, we need for you to understand the urgency of our plea. Should we fail to receive a positive response to this letter, many of us will begin exploring measures that will allow us to more aggressively demand a seat at the table. We cannot say if that will be collective regional action, or if individual municipalities will explore different options. Either way we all pray that it will not come to that, and that you will see the wisdom in allowing leaders across rural Pennsylvania, from Tionesta to Everett and Wellsboro to Waynesburg, to have a say in how our communities can reopen our economy safely but aggressively.

Respectfully submitted,

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//signed//  
Louis Radkowski, City of St. Marys Mayor

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Matthew Quesenberry, Elk County Commissioner

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Sam MacDonald, Ridgway Borough

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//signed//  
Fritz Lecker, Elk County Commissioner

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Alfred J. Malleto III, Johnsonburg Borough

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Joseph Dagher, Elk County Commissioner

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James McDonald, Bradford Mayor

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John D. Matson, Jefferson County Commissioner

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Dave Mattiuz, Fox Township Supervisor

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Herbert L. Bullers, Jr., Jefferson County Commissioner

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Michael Beaver, Ridgway Township Supervisor

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//signed//  
Jeffrey E. Pisarcik, Jefferson County Commissioner

Copy: Senator Joseph Scarnati  
Representative Matthew Gabler