



Barrington Area Council
Of Governments

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May 15, 2020

The Honorable J. B. Pritzker, Governor
State of Illinois
James R. Thompson Center
100 W. Randolph 16-100
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Dear Governor Pritzker:

The members of the Barrington Area Council of Governments (BACOG) appreciate the efforts that have gone into developing the *Restore Illinois* plan. Our municipal and township governments have been compliant with the Executive Orders as we share your concern for keeping residents safe during this COVID-19 public health situation. The Executive Board and membership have concerns, however, about provisions in *Restore Illinois* and we offer the following for your consideration.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Request to Governor to revise the 28-day metric for hospital admissions to 14 days
- Request to Governor to transition the four state regions to the IDPH 11 EMS regions
- Request to require IDPH to continue tracking and to publicly report data for each of the 11 regions
- Request to allow opening of small businesses including restaurants and bars in phase 3

We thank you for the opportunity to present our views and we look forward to continuing to work with your Administration in advancing the health of our citizens and our economy.

REVISE THE 28 DAY TIMELINE TO 14 DAYS

BACOG supports changing the time frame in *Restore Illinois* in the requirement regarding hospital admissions from 28 days to 14 days. The *Restore Illinois* plan specifically requires seeing no overall increase in hospital admissions for COVID-like illness, and instead sees stability or a decrease, across a 28-day period, in order to move from Phase 2 to Phase 3. The 28-day period is double what any other state in the country is using.

The situation with COVID-19 is changing quickly which argues for a 14-day decision schedule. We have seen no epidemiological studies that indicate the 28-day period is needed. The public health community indicates the 14-day period is adequate for the virus to incubate, for patient observation and for study of the data. Health professionals use this measure because a person is no longer shedding virus after 14 days and no longer infectious.

TRANSITION FROM NE ILLINOIS REGION TO 11 EMS REGIONS FOR GOVERNANCE

We believe *Restore Illinois* can be made even more effective by transitioning governance decisions away from the four large state regions to the 11 Emergency Medical Services (EMS) regions that exist across the entire state. In our view, the use of the long-standing Illinois Department of Public Health's (IDPH) statewide EMS regions 1 through 11 in making public health and economic reopening decisions is far more appropriate than the

current four large regions -- especially in the case of regions 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 in the current Northeast (NE) Region. Such a move would recognize that conditions vary immensely across the state as well as between metropolitan, suburban, and rural areas.

The hospitalizations and hospital surge capacity data – the lynchpin of metrics used to move through the phases of *Restore Illinois* -- have traditionally been reported by these 11 EMS regions. We believe the data should continue to be reported in this way as it accurately represents conditions in the highly-efficient EMS system. The EMS system itself will need to continue to function whether we are experiencing a COVID-19 pandemic or not, and data on medical capacity and capability at hospitals will be reported to the 11 regional EMS offices, irrespective of whether conditions are due to COVID-19 or heart attacks.

We therefore request that *Restore Illinois* use the 11 existing EMS Regions rather than the four statewide combined Regions to move from one phase to another.

We ask that the IDPH be required to continue tracking and to publicly report data for each of the 11 regions, as we are confident that the data that comes forth from region 9 will be different from the data that comes forth from other regions, such as region 11 and the City of Chicago.

There are a number of factors that contribute to our conclusions and requests, as outlined below.

Density.

Another reason to use the 11 EMS regions model in *Restore Illinois* is it better recognizes attributes of each region. For instance, the BACOG area of region 9, plus a significant part of the balance of region 9, are much less dense than other parts of the NE Region.

This is important because density of development is a significant contributor to a lower positivity rate, and this is agreed by public health professionals. The fact that densities are so low allows wide human spacing and the ability of facilities and businesses to expand outdoors to accommodate social distancing. Low density will continue to contribute to the low positivity rates in region 9, and this is also true in the other state regions.

Travel within Region.

We do not agree with the idea that the five regions of the NE Region should be coupled together because travel to and from the suburbs to Chicago will be a significant source of COVID-19 spread. There is compelling evidence that people are NOT traveling to and from the Chicago metropolitan area via public transportation.

For example, there is one station for the area for the Metra NW line (to/from Chicago) located in the Village of Barrington; this station serves the entire BACOG population of approximately 38,000 plus a number of adjacent municipalities. Ridership on the Metra NW line is reflected by parking in the downtown Barrington lot. The parking lot has 850 spaces total, and about 825 vehicles normally park per day. With COVID-19, the village is currently selling parking for only about 2% (total 16) of the spaces that are normally sold, which is a **reduction of 98% in Metra train travel from this area.**

Because many people can work from home and can continue to do so, we do not see this changing substantially in the near term.

Long Term Care Facilities.

Long Term Care facilities (LTCs) can be hot spots for COVID-19 outbreaks and deaths. The spread of COVID-19 in these facilities sends the numbers sky-high in regions hosting these facilities, despite the fact that LTCs are relatively self-contained. While acknowledging that staff in LTC can contract and spread infection, the many residents of LTCs typically are not very mobile and thus present a very low risk of spreading COVID-19. The LTC statistics in certain areas, however, skew the numbers upwards for all communities in the NE Region.

We would ask why the LTC numbers are included *at all* in the metrics that will determine lifting the stay-at-home order? We would also appreciate your help to understand the validity of including the LTC statistics from

the entire NE Region in a decision that will apply to region 9, which is an area relatively remote from these LTC facilities' outbreaks and numbers.

MODIFY RESTORE ILLINOIS TO ALLOW OPENING IN PHASE 3 OF SMALL BUSINESSES INCLUDING RESTAURANTS AND BARS

Small businesses are the lifeblood of local economies. There are small businesses throughout the state and within the BACOG region that have been hit especially hard. Many have already closed permanently and many more are on the verge of doing so. The loss of businesses, employers, jobs, income, and overall economic stability has been devastating and is getting worse. As of May 14, all four state regions in Illinois are on track to move to phase 3 by May 29, thus allowing many additional businesses to re-open with safety measures; however, restaurants and bars are excluded from this action.

Surely, small businesses have the ability to comply with safety measures such as social distancing and face coverings, enabling them to provide a safe environment for the public. While these small businesses may not be deemed essential under current legal definitions, we can assure you that they are absolutely essential to local economies and to the livelihoods of many people and families. In our view, the focus should be less about whether a business is deemed to be "essential" than it should be about whether some portion or all of a business can be safely reopened.

We ask you to consider how we can help our remaining small businesses to operate on a more equal footing with the big box retailers that have been allowed to remain open throughout the pandemic.

We also request that you direct the development of precautions, operational restrictions, and controls for the opening of restaurants, bars and other businesses for inclusion in phase 3 of *Restore Illinois*.

Additionally, moving to the use of the 11 EMS regions would allow many communities and businesses to move to phases 3 and 4 in accordance with the *Restore Illinois* thresholds based on their own region's metrics and conditions. The status of "meeting the metrics" may not always be the case, however, because the data changes every day. If the suburban/rural areas are coupled with the entire metropolitan NE Region, the low-density rural and suburban regions, for example, may have metrics that are *improving and adequate for keeping businesses open* while the more urban areas are falling back. This would result in setbacks, re-closings and/or no foreseeable re-openings -- based on metrics 50 to 100 miles away.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we are appealing to you to revise the 28-day metric for hospital admissions to 14 days. We urge you to consider the unique characteristics and metrics of regions across Illinois and transition the four state regions to the IDPH 11 EMS regions.

We urge you to judge us by our Region 9 data and allow us to move forward by meeting the required metrics of *Restore Illinois*.

We also ask you to ensure that IDPH is tracking data for each of the 11 regions and making the metrics available to the public.

We are hopeful you will modify the plan to allow opening of more small businesses.

In summary, the Barrington Area Council of Governments commends you, Governor Pritzker, for developing the *Restore Illinois* plan to provide a path forward for Illinois communities and to help keep our residents and communities safe from COVID-19. We additionally embrace the goal of helping to restore the region's economy as conditions allow.

We offer to work with you to adapt the plan to accommodate the changes requested in this letter and enable our communities to move toward re-opening.

If you would like to discuss any issue further, please do not hesitate to reach out to me via email j.agnoletti@bacog.org or mobile at (847) 927-0542. I also would be happy to put you in touch with any of our Executive Board members, undersigned below.

Sincerely yours,

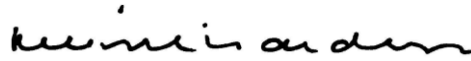


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Karen Darch, President
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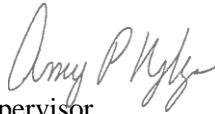
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