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Governor Northam Declares State of Emergency, Outlines Additional Measures to Combat COVID-19

Governor issues guidance on large events and state workforce, activates long-term economic plan

RICHMOND—Governor Ralph Northam today declared a state of emergency in the Commonwealth of Virginia in response to the continued spread of novel coronavirus, or COVID-19.

While Virginia has been thoroughly preparing for weeks and has adequate funding to address the situation, this declaration will allow the Commonwealth increased flexibility to ease regulatory requirements and procurement rules, continue federal and multi-state coordination, and ensure continued access to critical services for the most vulnerable Virginians. In addition, it has become increasingly clear that states must take a primary leadership role in the national response to COVID-19. The full text of the Governor's emergency declaration is available here.

"Our top priority is to make sure Virginians stay safe and healthy, and that our response to this situation leaves no one behind," **said Governor Northam**. "From our health department, to our schools, to our hospitals, to our transit systems, Virginia's agencies and institutions have been thoroughly planning for every scenario. This emergency declaration will ensure we can continue to prepare for and appropriately respond to Virginians' needs during this time."

Governor Northam also announced additional steps to ensure the health and safety of all Virginians, including:

Ban on State Employee Travel and Implementation of Telework Policies

Virginia has over 100,000 state employees stationed throughout the Commonwealth. Governor Northam has halted all official travel outside of Virginia by state employees, with increased flexibility for inter-state commuters and essential personnel. Specific guidance will be released to agency heads and state employees, and Virginia will revisit these guidelines after 30 days.

Governor Northam has also directed his Secretary of Administration to implement a phased transition to teleworking for state employees. The Department of Human Resources Management will work with the Virginia Department of Health's Equity Workgroup to prioritize support for impacted state employees that may be unable to perform their duties from home, including janitorial, food, and grounds staff.

The Department of Human Resources Management has worked to ensure all agencies have updated emergency operations and leave policies. State employees, including part-time employees, can access paid Public Health Emergency Leave in the event of exposure to COVID-19 or high-risk travel.

Public Gatherings and Large Events

In accordance with advice from state public health experts, the Commonwealth of Virginia will cancel all specially-scheduled state conferences and large events for a minimum of 30 days.

Governor Northam is directing state agencies, through the Department of Human Resource Management, to limit in-person meetings and non-essential, work-related gatherings.

Governor Northam is also urging localities and non-profits to limit large public events, effective immediately. Localities should make these decisions in coordination with their local health departments and the Virginia Department of Health. Highly populated localities and those with close proximity to positive cases are strongly encouraged to announce updated event guidance by Friday, March 13, at 5:00 PM, in advance of the weekend.

Long-Term Economic Planning

Governor Northam is also assessing the potential long-term economic impacts of COVID-19. While containing the spread of the public health threat remains a top priority, Governor Northam is working with state and local partners to ensure Virginia are prepared for any continued economic disruption.

Virginia's Secretary of Commerce and Trade will coordinate regularly with representatives from the Virginia Employment Commission, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity, the Department of Labor and Industry, the Virginia Tourism Corporation, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and other relevant stakeholders.

Throughout his administration, Governor Northam has worked closely with state legislators to protect Virginia's strong economy and prepare for unexpected economic shocks. The General Assembly will vote today on a budget that boosts Virginia's reserve funds more than at any

other time in the Commonwealth's history, an essential mechanism to ensure continued state services regardless of economic uncertainty.

Ongoing State Response Efforts

The Commonwealth of Virginia is continuing to execute a multi-agency response plan across all levels of government. Efforts include the following:

Schools

- The Department of Education has advised all school districts to update their pandemic guidelines, in consultation with their local health departments.
- The Northam administration continues to be in regular communication with superintendents, university and community college presidents, to provide guidance on the unique situations they are facing on the ground.

Nursing Homes

- The Virginia Department of Health has expanded its testing criteria to ensure that anyone who has symptoms and is in a nursing home is top priority and gets immediate testing.
- Nursing homes and senior care facilities have updated their policies to provide additional visitor screening and increased monitoring of patients.

Vulnerable Virginians

- Virginia's social services agencies are preparing options to ensure the most vulnerable populations have continued access to critical services, including the potential for in-home care and food supports.
- In the event of extended school closures, the Virginia Department of Social Services is working with local partners, such as food pantries, to ensure no one goes hungry.

Addressing Barriers to Care

- Virginia is working with insurers to waive co-pays and diagnostic testing related to COVID-19.
- Governor Northam continues to encourage private businesses to explore telework and paid time off options, including those with hourly workers.

Transportation

- Across the Commonwealth's transportation network, which includes airports, Metro, buses, and rail, Virginia is adjusting cleaning schedules according to CDC protocol.
- Virginia is also working with transportation partners to help reduce the potential spread of disease.

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