For Immediate Release: March 17, 2020

Contacts: Office of the Governor: Alena Yarmosky, Alena.Yarmosky@governor.virginia.gov

Governor Northam Announces New Measures to Combat COVID-19 and Support Impacted Virginians

Directs adherence to 10-person gathering ban, quarantine for high-risk individuals, worker and employer support

RICHMOND—Governor Ralph Northam today announced additional steps to help Virginians impacted by novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, stop the spread of the virus in the Commonwealth, and protect public health.

"Everyone must play a role to help flatten the curve and mitigate the spread of this virus, and that starts with social distancing," **said Governor Northam**. "We know this will be a hardship for many businesses, and we are assisting workers affected by closures. Public health relies on every individual using common sense and making responsible decisions. We can and will get through this difficult time. But we must work together to do so."

Video of today's media briefing is available here.

Further Reducing Public Gatherings

Governor Northam told Virginians to avoid non-essential gatherings of more than 10 people, per federal guidelines. This does not include normal operations at essential services such as manufacturers, distribution centers, airports, bus and train stations, medical facilities, grocery stores, or pharmacies.

Protecting High-Risk Virginians

Those with chronic health conditions or aged 65 or older should self-quarantine. Public health experts advise that individuals with underlying medical conditions and those aged 65 or older are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Governor Northam encouraged neighbors and friends to stay in touch and regularly check in with high-risk individuals.

Increasing Social Distancing

All restaurants, fitness centers, and theaters are mandated to significantly reduce their capacity to 10 patrons, or close. Restaurants are encouraged to continue carry-out and takeaway options.

Support for Affected Workers

Governor Northam announced the following actions to protect working Virginians impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak:

- **No waiting for unemployment benefits.** Governor Northam has directed the Commissioner of the Virginia Employment Commission to waive the one-week waiting period to ensure workers can receive benefits as soon as possible.
- **Enhanced eligibility for unemployment.** Workers may be eligible to receive unemployment benefits if an employer needs to temporarily slow or cease operations due to COVID-19. If a worker has been issued a notice to self-quarantine by a medical or public health official and is not receiving paid sick or medical leave from their employer, they may be eligible to receive unemployment benefits. In addition, a worker may be eligible for unemployment benefits if they must stay home to care for an ill family member and are not receiving paid family medical leave from their employer.
- **Fewer restrictions.** For individuals receiving unemployment insurance, Governor Northam is directing the Virginia Employment Commission to give affected workers special consideration on deadlines, mandatory re-employment appointments, and work search requirements.

The Office of the Governor is providing a Frequently Asked Questions guide for workers that have been temporarily laid off or discharged during this public health crisis.

Support for Impacted Employers

- Regional workforce teams will be activated to support employers that slow or cease operations. Employers who do slow or cease operations will not be financially penalized for an increase in workers requesting unemployment benefits.
- The Governor is authorizing rapid response funding, through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, for employers eligible to remain open during this emergency. Funds may be used to clean facilities and support emergency needs.
- Governor Northam is directing all employers to follow U.S. Department of Labor guidance on workplace safety.

Department of Motor Vehicle Office Closures

- Virginia's 75 DMV offices, as well as mobile units, will close to the public.

- Online services will remain available, and anyone needing to renew a license or vehicle registration is encouraged to do so online.
- For those who cannot renew online, or whose license or registration expires before May 15, DMV will grant a 60-day extension.

Courts

Governor Northam requested and the Supreme Court of Virginia granted a judicial emergency in response to COVID-19. From Monday, March 16 through Monday, April 6, non-essential, non-emergency court proceedings in all district and circuit courts are suspended absent a specific exemption. This includes a prohibition on new eviction cases for tenants who are unable to pay rent as a result of COVID-19. All non-exempted court deadlines are tolled and extended for a period of 21 days.

Utilities

The State Corporation Commission (SCC) issued an order directing utilities it regulates, such as electric, natural gas, and water companies in Virginia, to suspend service disconnections for 60 days to provide immediate relief for any customer, residential and business, who may be financially impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak.

For a comprehensive list of actions Governor Northam has announced to combat COVID-19 in Virginia, visit virginia.gov/coronavirus.

# # #