

SAVE LIVES. SUPPORT WORKERS. PRIORITIZE SCHOOLS.

#LAUnitedAgainstCovid #LockdownNOW

December 16, 2020

Re: Circuit breaker to save lives

Dear LA County Board of Supervisors,

On December 16, LA County reported 22,422 new COVID-19 cases, recording the highest daily COVID-19 infection count since the start of the pandemic, and surpassing the daily COVID-19 infection rate of almost every other county in the state.¹ As the dire situation worsens, we are calling on you to take bold action now to save lives and to support our most vulnerable working families.

In the face of record-breaking infection levels, soaring hospitalization rates, full ICUs, and the looming wave of deaths that is soon to follow, we call on you to enact what is known as a “circuit breaker” — a period of meaningful stay-at-home orders that are strict enough to significantly slow transmission for the first four weeks of January. We urge you to immediately call for state and federal funds to allow LA County to have a true lockdown, one that prioritizes the lives of everyone — particularly essential workers and working families — over comfort and convenience.

Your leadership in scheduling this circuit breaker now, in a way that would allow businesses to stay closed and people to stay safe at home for January, is crucial for several reasons:

1. This would lower cases to relieve the pressure on hospitals and healthcare workers, allow state and local health agencies to strengthen the testing and tracing system, and allow the system to work better to prevent future surges in viral transmission.²
2. This would allow businesses and residents time to plan, and the definite end date would mitigate some of the mental health effects caused by the yo-yo effect of open-ended restrictions.
3. This requires providing necessary safety nets to businesses, workers, and families directly impacted by closures. Some of these safety nets can be enacted at the local level, such as free testing and treatment for COVID-19; suspension of mortgage/rent payments and evictions; a direct payment to subsidize lost wages during the circuit breaker; free meals for those under quarantine; paid leave for those who fall ill or who need to take care of family members who have fallen ill; strong safety protections for essential workers, including local vaccine allocation prioritization for those workers in alignment with ACIP recommendations; and worker retention policies for those laid off during this crisis.
4. Elected leaders representing Angelenos must also aggressively advocate for safety nets at the state and federal level that would allow businesses to stay closed and people to stay safe at home during the duration of this crisis. Examples of such safety nets include ongoing direct payments and subsidies for individuals and small businesses, debt and loan forgiveness so that those payments are spent to reinvigorate local economies rather than to big banks, and a health system that reduces and eventually eliminates the racial and economic disparities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. All elected leaders representing Angelenos must not just be participants in local solutions, but must also go further and be strong advocates for broader societal supports and COVID-19 relief packages that prioritize working families and students.

5. We must prioritize the educational and health needs of school-aged children, especially our highest needs students, by doing what is necessary to bring the virus under control so that safe in-person instruction can once again be a possibility. This includes significantly reduced daily new cases and test positivity rates, an infection rate (R0) below 1, a robust testing program to test both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals, and bringing cases down to a level where contact tracing can be successful at identifying and isolating those with the virus.³

The victims of COVID-19 are not random. They are overwhelmingly essential workers, poor people, and people of color. Angelenos make up 40% of COVID-19 deaths in California, despite only making up 25% of the state population.⁴ Latinos in Los Angeles are dying of COVID at twice the rate of white people.⁵ One in three Black Americans personally know someone who has died of COVID.⁶ In Los Angeles, Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders have the highest COVID-19 crude and adjusted death rates than any other racial/ethnic group.⁷ Asians who become infected with COVID-19 are over four times as likely to die compared to other Angelenos.⁸ Residents of high poverty areas are dying at nearly twice the rate of wealthier residents.⁹ People of color, many of whom are essential workers, are dying at twice the rate of other residents.¹⁰ By doing all you can to suppress this pandemic surge, you will be protecting our families and friends who are especially at risk of infection and death due to racial and economic inequities.

Survey after survey of parents show that it is overwhelmingly white and wealthy parents who would send their children back to schools now.¹¹ Meanwhile, parents of color and working-class parents are far more hesitant to return to school because they know full well that it is their families and friends getting sick and dying.¹² Due to uncontrolled viral spread, children in Los Angeles are facing the prospect of an entire school year spent without much-needed in-person instruction. Instead, we saw cardrooms, bars, brewpubs, in-person dining, mini-golf, hair salons, and non-essential retail allowed to reopen in LA County, even as students and educators struggled together to navigate crisis distance learning.

Our teachers want to be in classrooms with their students, and our students need to be in classrooms with their teachers and friends — but only when it is safe to return, in a way that does not further exacerbate the racial and economic inequities of this pandemic.

As businesses linked to Trump received millions in coronavirus relief meant for small businesses, LA residents had to make do with a one-time payment of \$1,200.¹³ LA County is the largest county by output, contributing over \$710 billion GDP to the U.S. economy — LA County leaders should demand that in this time of crisis, the people and businesses that power this country's economic engine should be supported instead of sacrificed to the pandemic.¹⁴

In exponential epidemics, early action is essential. As a country, it seems we have all but surrendered in the fight against COVID. But there is still time for LA County's elected leaders to take bold leadership, based on science and rooted in equity, to save lives. Saving lives is, in fact, a prerequisite to saving jobs, businesses, and our children's futures. Therefore, we are calling for an urgent circuit breaker to suppress the spread of COVID-19 and save lives.

Los Angeles County is the largest governmental body in California — and is also leading the state in cases and deaths. The case rate in Los Angeles is nearly four times that of San Francisco's. This is not acceptable¹⁵. We must show the rest of the country how we can beat COVID and return to work, return to school, and return to socializing with the ones we love.

Sincerely,

AF3IRM, conveners of Kanlungan.net

AFSCME Local 3299

Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE)

California Nurses Association (CNA) President, Zenei Cortez, RN

LAANE - Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy

National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW)

Reclaim Our Schools Los Angeles (ROSLA)

Southeast Asian Community Alliance (SEACA)

Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE)

Students Deserve

UFCW Local 770

UNITE HERE LOCAL 11

United Auto Workers Local 2865, representing Academic Student Employees at University of California

United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA)

Prof. Ninez Ponce, MPP, PhD, UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, UCLA Fielding School of Public Health*

Dr. Ryan Huerto, Family Medicine Physician, National Clinician Scholars Program at the University of Michigan*

Dr. Sue Chang, Pathologist, Assistant Clinical Professor, City of Hope*

** institutional affiliation is provided for identification purposes only*



¹ Among large California Counties, only Riverside County has a higher unadjusted case rate per 100,000 than Los Angeles County. “Blueprint for a Safer Economy,” California Department of Public Health, December 8, 2020, <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/COVID19CountyMonitoringOverview.aspx>, accessed on December 8, 2020; and “As L.A. County Surges Past Previous Highs of COVID-19 Deaths, Cases and Hospitalizations, Public Health Calls on Everyone to Stay Home During this Dangerous Time,” Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, December 16, 2020, Press Release.

² “Summary of the Effectiveness and Harms of Different Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions,” *SAGE UK*, September 21, 2020, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/925854/S0769_Summary_of_effectiveness_and_harms_of_NPIs.pdf, accessed on December 11, 2020.

³ “Key Metrics for COVID Suppression,” Harvard Global Health Institution, July 1, 2020.

⁴ Based on population estimates from U.S. Census on July 1, 2019, California population is 39,512,223 and Los Angeles County population is 10,039,107, which would be 25.4% of the State’s population. “Quick Facts,” United States Census, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/CA,losangelescountycalifornia,US/PST045219>, accessed on December 11, 2020.

⁵ COVID-19 Dashboard, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, http://dashboard.publichealth.lacounty.gov/covid19_surveillance_dashboard/, accessed on December 11, 2020.

⁶ Amy Goldstein and Emily Guskin, “Almost one-third of black Americans know someone who died of covid-19, survey shows,” *Washington Post*, June 26, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/almost-one-third-of-black-americans-know-someone-who-died-of-covid-19-survey-shows/2020/06/25/3ec1d4b2-b563-11ea-aca5-ebb63d27e1ff_story.html, accessed on December 11, 2020.

⁷ COVID-19 Dashboard, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, http://dashboard.publichealth.lacounty.gov/covid19_surveillance_dashboard/, accessed on December 11, 2020.

⁸ COVID-19 Dashboard, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, http://dashboard.publichealth.lacounty.gov/covid19_surveillance_dashboard/, accessed on December 11, 2020.

⁹ Socio-economic class is not a variable that is recorded for those who die of COVID-19, but location of residence is. Based on residence, LA County records “Area Poverty” by less than 10%, 10% to 20%, 20% to 30%, and more than 30%. COVID-19 Dashboard, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, http://dashboard.publichealth.lacounty.gov/covid19_surveillance_dashboard/, accessed on December 11, 2020.

¹⁰ “COVID-19 Hospitalization and Death by Race/Ethnicity,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, November 30, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>, accessed on December 11, 2020.

¹¹ Among the many surveys: Sarah Dockery Sparks, “Parent Racial, Income Divides Seen on School Reopening Preferences,” *Education Week*, July 28, 2020, https://www.edweek.org/leadership/parent-racial-income-divides-seen-on-school-reopening-preferences/2020/07?cmp=eml-enl-eu-news&M=%25%25MESSAGE_ID%25%25&U=%25%EF%BF%BD_ICNACCOUNTNUMBER%25%25&UID=%25%25MD5_EMAIL%25%25, accessed on December 11, 2020; Matt Barnum and Claire Bryan, “Despite stress of closures, most parents wary of rush to return to school buildings, polls show,” *Chalkbeat*, June 14, 2020, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2020/7/14/21324873/school-closure-reopening-parents-surveys>, accessed on December 11, 2020; “KFF Health Tracking Poll – July 2020,” Kaiser Family Foundation, July 27, 2020, <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/report/kff-health-tracking-poll-july-2020/>, accessed on December 11, 2020.

¹² Amy Goldstein and Emily Guskin, “Almost one-third of black Americans know someone who died of covid-19, survey shows,” *Washington Post*, June 26, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/almost-one-third-of-black-americans-know-someone-who-died-of-covid-19-survey-shows/2020/06/25/3ec1d4b2-b563-11ea-aca5-ebb63d27e1ff_story.html, accessed on December 11, 2020, and, Cary Funk and Alec Tyson, “Intent to Get a COVID-19 Vaccine Rises to 60% as Confidence in Research and Development Process Increases,” Pew Research Center, December 3, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2020/12/03/intent-to-get-a-covid-19-vaccine-rises-to-60-as-confidence-in-research-and-development-process-increases/>, accessed on December 11, 2020.

¹³ Mark Niquette, “Bailout List Includes Firms with Trump Ties, Major Nonprofits,” *Washington Post*, July 6, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>, accessed on December 11, 2020.

¹⁴ Andre Tartar and Reade Pickert, “One-third of the U.S. economy is jammed into just 31 counties. L.A. is the biggest,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2019-12-19/los-angeles-largest-economy#:~:text=L.A.%20is%20the%20biggest,of%20the%20U.S.%20total%20economy.&text=While%20the%20nation's%20economy%20has,1%25%20of%20the%20nation's%20counties.>, accessed on December 9, 2020.

¹⁵ As of 12/12/2020, Los Angeles County Adjusted Case Rate of 26.9 versus San Francisco County Adjusted Case Rate of 7.2