



Office of the County Administrator

Rick House, County Administrator

PRESS RELEASE

Date: March 23, 2020

Re: County Operations

In response to the COVID-19 emergency, a telephone conference was held again today with the County's 26 department heads and the 15 members of the Board of Supervisors. The purpose of this (3 times a week) remote meeting is to keep everyone informed on all of the County's operations in respect to response to the COVID-19 emergency. New ideas are shared everyday by staff regarding innovative ways to continue the provision of essential services in light of the huge reduction of employees. We are also implementing best practices to keep both staff and visitors safe.

A Public Health update was provided by County Public Health Director Diane Devlin. Public Health was notified over the weekend that 2 more hospitalized individuals have tested positive (+) for COVID-19. The current total is 4 positive cases. These individuals had limited community contacts from the date of symptom onset. Public Health staff are working long hours to ensure that all contacts (community and healthcare workers) are identified and then are placed on mandatory or precautionary quarantine depending on the situation. Proper procedures have been followed at each hospital and at the health department.

Emergency Management Director George Bastedo continues to process requests to NYS for personal protective equipment for emergency responders. However, lead times continue to be extremely long, with only two orders out of 19 being fulfilled over the last two weeks.

The County did receive a pallet of hand sanitizer from the state on Friday which is being distributed to front-line staff, especially at the Nursing Home. Prevention of the COVID-19 virus from being introduced into the Nursing Home is critical and the Nursing Home is taking every measure possible to screen staff and sanitize the facility.

The County has furloughed 302 employees to stay in compliance with the Governor's Executive order requiring a reduction in 50% of non-essential staff. The reduction of staff at the Department of Social

Services is a huge concern for the County because of the appreciable increase in the number of people requiring services because of the COVID-19 impact.

DSS Commissioner Dr. Ellen Wayne reported that the State has put in place several provisions that either ease eligibility requirements or eliminate the need for persons to present to the building, however those provisions are not intended to in any way reduce the supports and services that are made available to persons in need.

“What we are seeing locally is a daily increase in requests for assistance, understandably as persons find themselves with either eliminated or reduced hours of employment. For instance, electronically filed applications for SNAP (formerly Food Stamps) began to see an increase early last week. While we had typically received an average of five applications per day, by the end of the week we were up to an average of 15 per day. By midday today (Monday) that number had increased to 23 applications. As we communicate with our colleagues from around the state, they all report similar trends,” stated Dr. Wayne.

“Additionally, housing and homelessness continues to be a concern. Here in Wayne County our resources for emergency housing are limited, and often our response is short term, based on eligibility guidelines. That alone generally creates the opportunity for available resources to become available. With state imposed restrictions in place related to essential employment and businesses, we really cannot expect a homeless individual to undertake robust employment search. As a result, we find ourselves extending the length of time we support persons in temporary housing, creating a strain on the number of units we have available. Additionally, we know that often family and friends are willing to make their homes available to temporarily house persons experiencing homelessness. In this current situation, it makes sense that people are either unwilling or financially not in a position to extend that level of help. In the last three days we have responded to 5 new situations of homelessness in Wayne County,” commented Dr. Wayne.

The County will continue to work very hard to provide necessary services to our residents under these extremely difficult times.

For information regarding the current status of the various County operations, please visit our website: web.co.wayne.ny.us and click on the department tab at the top of the page.