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Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus

May 7, 2020

The Honorable Tom Wolf
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf,

On behalf of the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus, we would like to highlight the continuation of racial and economic divide in black, brown and poor communities brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. Disparities in health, education and economic development have been exacerbated in recent months as a result of COVID-19 plaguing communities across the state, nation and world. On behalf of communities of color across the commonwealth, we want to ensure that the leaders of our state not only recognize but prioritize addressing these long standing issues that continue to hold these communities behind and put valuable lives at risk.

Minority owned businesses are suffering to survive, let alone thrive; our schools are struggling to ensure that children have the proper equipment and resources for them to continue learning; and African Americans are dying at a disproportionately higher rate than any other racial or ethnic group due to complications of the coronavirus. We commend you for creating the COVID-19 Response Task Force for Health Disparity and believe that this is most certainly a step in the right direction, however, we must do more. With the \$3.9 billion that our commonwealth is expected to receive from the federal government, the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus is urging you to ensure much needed funding is invested to address the following issues and disparities.

Minority Owned Business

We request that \$300 million be directed towards efforts to support black and brown owned businesses. Minority owned businesses were already at a disadvantage before COVID-19 and are inevitably categorized as “at-risk,” with many of them lacking equitable access to resources that would help them to remain in business in the foreseeable future. Moreover, the Small Business Administration has stated that Black business owners are three times more likely to have trouble accessing capital, which affects their profit and sustainability. This allocated funding would assist minority owned businesses in recovery of damages incurred as a result of the coronavirus and help them transition to business post-COVID-19.

Healthcare

As we anticipate the day when we will be able to resume normal activities while also preparing for a predicted “second wave” it is crucial to make investments in the healthcare industry to fulfill needs for technical assistance, expansion

of infrastructure across the commonwealth and targeted testing and tracing – prioritizing our most vulnerable communities. With this in mind we urge that \$125 million be directed towards testing, tracing and health education in at-risk communities. The Black Doctors COVID-19 Consortium, a group of 30 medical professionals, has implemented an ideal model addressing this need by providing mobile testing sites in high-risk neighborhoods throughout the Philadelphia region. The Consortium has been successful in their efforts however, as a grassroots organization, they and others are in need of financial support to continue and scale such efforts. We request that an additional \$150 million be allocated to establish the PA Center for Health Equity where \$100 million would be used to establish a grant fund to reimburse groups and organizations for the purchase of personal protection equipment (PPE) and testing administration.

Higher Education

Access to higher education has always been a priority and we need to ensure that the coronavirus pandemic does not further disrupt people's access to this option for continued education. In addition to \$250 million set aside to address student loan debt for residents across the state, we believe that \$20 million should be set aside respectfully for the Commonwealth's historically black colleges and universities -- \$10 million for Cheyney University and \$10 million dollars for Lincoln University -- for we know that the impact of the Coronavirus has created increased financial challenges for these two respected institutions.

Housing Stabilization

We urge you to direct \$40 million to help impoverished communities, particularly communities of color, faced with food and housing insecurity. The same communities that suffer lack of appropriate shelter need dollars to support the various housing programs that provide housing for low income families and programs that help to provide access to fresh fruits and vegetables. These funds would be set aside to assist residents with rental assistance, mortgage assistance and property owner subsidies.

Digital Divide

We are also witnessing major concerns related to technology. Many seniors and children in black and brown communities are far too often left behind due to the lack of education, training and resources to address the digital divide. For this we urge you to invest \$20 million directly into these communities to increase access and use of technology, considering our new virtual reality.

Environmental Remediation

Last but certainly not least, we must recognize the impact that the coronavirus pandemic and long-term closures have had on infrastructure. We request that \$150 million be allocated to environmental remediation for use on school buildings, senior housing buildings, public buildings and restaurants. These long-term closures come with their own set of public health risks and to ensure that we protect the safety of our communities, we must invest in the remediation of potential hazards that have come about as a result of the state's stay at home order.

We recognize that there are numerous areas that are in dire need of attention and financial support from our state leaders in Harrisburg. We cannot stress the importance of you ensuring that there are additional basic education dollars secured through the fair funding formula. And just as importantly, we join you in pushing for additional dollars to support those frontline workers who at low pay, continue to put their personal lives aside for the health, safety and welfare of others across our commonwealth.

Thank you for your attention to these critical issues.

Respectfully yours,



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