

SECRETARY OF THE SENATE MINORITY

RANKING MINORITY MEMBER  
ENERGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT

THE SENATE  
STATE OF NEW YORK



SENATOR PATTY RITCHIE  
48TH DISTRICT  
OSWEGO, JEFFERSON, ST. LAWRENCE COUNTIES

COMMITTEES  
ELECTIONS  
FINANCE  
HEALTH  
VETERANS, HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
MILITARY AFFAIRS  
WOMEN'S ISSUES  
MEMBER  
LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON RURAL  
RESOURCES

May 2, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor  
Executive Chamber  
The Capitol  
Albany, NY 12225

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We write today to follow up on our April 17<sup>th</sup> letter to you regarding the reopening of upstate New York.

Since we last wrote, our region has continued to see a low level of infection rates and a minimal level—if any—of community spread. We credit this largely to our residents, who have taken this pandemic seriously. They have risen to the challenge; working hard to adhere to stringent social-distancing practices and taking precautionary actions such as wearing masks and avoiding congregate settings. Further, our hospitals, which have low-occupancy rates and very few hospitalized COVID-19 cases, have continued to be well-positioned to respond to any outbreaks. We are confident that moving forward, these practices will continue.

In recent weeks, many of our constituents have reached out to convey the tremendous struggles they are facing. We have heard from countless small business owners, whose livelihoods have been decimated. Hundreds, if not thousands, have contacted us to express frustration and fear over the fact that they are still waiting—in some cases, for nearly two months—for their unemployment claims to be processed. These are people, who through no fault of their own, were forced to stop working. Many of them are eager to safely get back to work.

“Phase One” of your reopening plan will allow for construction and manufacturing to resume. However, as you are aware, manufacturing upstate has declined over a period of decades. Much of the economy is driven by small businesses. Whether it’s agriculture, service-related businesses or “mom-and-pop” establishments, the bulk of our region’s economy is supported by businesses that operate in environments that are not at all dense and pose little risk of transmission of illness if proper precautions are taken.

REPLY TO:  ALBANY OFFICE: ROOM 302, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247 (518) 455-3438  
 JEFFERSON COUNTY OFFICE: 317 WASHINGTON STREET, ROOM 418, WATERTOWN, NEW YORK 13601 (315) 782-3418  
 OSWEGO COUNTY OFFICE: 46 EAST BRIDGE STREET, FIRST FLOOR, OSWEGO, NEW YORK 13126 (315) 342-2057  
 ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY OFFICE: 330 FORD STREET, OGDENSBURG, NEW YORK 13669 (315) 393-3024

E-MAIL: RITCHIE@NYSENATE.GOV  
WEBSITE: RITCHIE.NYSENATE.GOV



In addition, due to the rural nature of our communities, it is easier for the people we represent to practice social distancing when compared to other regions. For example, when an employee travels to and from work, they aren't packing into a subway car. They're getting into their own vehicle—alone—and many times going straight into work in the morning and returning home at the end of the workday.

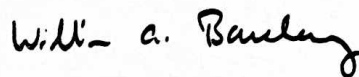
Given this fact, combined with our area's low infection rate, we are respectfully requesting that on May 15<sup>th</sup> our region immediately move to "Phase Two" of reopening. As mentioned, the people of our region have proven they are taking this pandemic seriously. Holding our region to the same standard as downstate, which like upstate is slated to reopen on May 15<sup>th</sup> under "Phase One" guidelines, will only increase the severity of the economic damage resulting from the Coronavirus. If our already-fragile economy is going to survive, people need to get back to work in a safe and responsible manner as soon as possible. Our small business owners care about the health of the workforce and the public at large. We are confident they will institute the necessary protocols that will mitigate the potential for infection and spread of COVID-19.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this matter. We look forward to your timely response to our request.

Sincerely,



Patty Ritchie  
State Senator



William Barclay  
Assembly Minority Leader



Ken Blankenbush  
Member of Assembly



Mark Walczyk  
Member of Assembly

Scott Gray  
Jefferson County Board of Legislators Chair

James Weatherup  
Oswego County Board of Legislators Chair

Joseph Lightfoot  
St. Lawrence County Legislator

Larry Dolhof  
Lewis County Board of Legislators Chair