

CHAIRMAN, MAJORITY MEMBER

ELECTIONS

COMMITTEES

CODES

CONSUMER PROTECTION

CRIME VICTIMS, CRIME AND CORRECTION

DOMESTIC ANIMAL WELFARE

HOUSING, CONSTRUCTION AND

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

JUDICIARY

SOCIAL SERVICES

NEW YORK
STATE
SENATE



SENATOR ZELNOR Y. MYRIE
20TH SENATE DISTRICT

ALBANY OFFICE:

ROOM 903
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247
(518) 455-2410
FAX: (518) 426-6856

EMAIL ADDRESS:

MYRIE@NYSENATE.GOV

Commissioner Howard Zucker
New York State Department of Health
Corning Tower
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12237

Commissioner Oxiris Barbot
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
42-09 28th Street
Long Island City, NY 11101

Tuesday, April 7, 2020

Dear Commissioners:

As the COVID-19 crisis continues to ravage our city and state, we write with concern over a lack of information on the scope of the crisis and the degree to which it is affecting the African American and other vulnerable populations. History and data from other areas show us that this pandemic is disproportionately harming African Americans but we do not have the data to verify that reality in New York nor address it.

Around the country, the rate of infection and death among African Americans is far outpacing those of other groups:

- In Chicago, where African Americans make up 23 percent of the population, they've represented 70 percent of the COVID-19 related deaths.¹
- In Milwaukee, African Americans make up 81 percent of the COVID-19 deaths and only 26 percent of the population.²
- In the state of Michigan, African Americans make up 35% of cases and 40% of deaths; their population is 14% black.³

¹ <https://www.wbez.org/stories/in-chicago-70-of-covid-19-deaths-are-black/dd3f295f-445e-4e38-b37f-a1503782b507>

² <https://www.propublica.org/article/early-data-shows-african-americans-have-contracted-and-died-of-coronavirus-at-an-alarming-rate>

³ *Ibid.*

Unsurprisingly, it appears that New York City is no exception. The city’s DOHMH released a data set that indicates the location of positive cases. Geographically, the data suggests a correlation between low-income, majority-minority neighborhoods and high rates of positive cases. Using additional census data, an analysis by ANHD found that “high rates of positive COVID-19 cases are concentrated in neighborhoods where many of New York’s frontline service workers reside.”⁴

This evidence aligns with what we already know about African Americans’ disproportionately high risk of contracting the virus and potentially losing their lives from it. Due to their most common occupations, socioeconomic status, and other factors: people of color are more likely than others to work in the service sector, where they are more likely to come into contact with a high volume of people; they’re more likely to travel long distances via public transportation to work; they’re more likely to rent their home in large buildings; and they have higher than average rates of comorbidities that put them at higher risk of death from COVID-19.

Still, neither the NYC DOHMH nor the State’s Department of Health are breaking down data concerning tests, confirmed cases, hospitalizations, or deaths by any demographics other than age range and sex. This is disconcerting. We need COVID-19 data broken down by race/ethnicity and we need it urgently. If there is a barrier to getting this information, then we need to identify it and address it.

The novel coronavirus has been called a “great equalizer,” in that its impact seems destined to reach everywhere and everyone in some way. While it is true that anyone can contract the virus and this crisis reaches all of us, it is absolutely not true that the harm it causes is distributed equally. On the contrary, it is clear that COVID-19 is hurting most the ones with the least. If we are to begin to address this disparity now, we need the information that will guide our efforts. Please make this data available now.

We appreciate your prompt response to this inquiry.

Sincerely,



Zellnor Y. Myrie
NYS Senator, District 20



Jamaal T. Bailey
NYS Senator, District 36

4