



Allegheny County Council

County of Allegheny
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Legislation Text

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Motion of the Council of Allegheny County requiring staff within the Office of County Council to work remotely, subject to the conditions established herein, through January 19, 2021.

Whereas, the Allegheny County Chief Executive declared a health emergency in Allegheny County on March 12, 2020, noting that the COVID-19 virus constitutes an “imminent threat to public health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Allegheny County”;

Whereas, at the time this declaration was made, there were zero confirmed COVID-19 cases in Allegheny County, and 21 confirmed cases within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, according to data compiled by the Pennsylvania Department of Health and distributed by the Allegheny County Department of Human Resources; and

Whereas, the County’s declaration of emergency thus was clearly premised upon fears of an escalating number of COVID-19 infections, and the burdens that large numbers of individuals suffering with the disease would place upon the County’s healthcare and other infrastructure; and

Whereas, based upon these same fears regarding escalating case numbers (and also on March 12, 2020), the Allegheny County Department of Health updated its guidance and recommendations for the County; and

Whereas, the concerns expressed by the Health Department and Chief Executive have proven well-founded, as the United States has not had less than 100,000 new COVID-19 cases on any date since November 3, 2020; and

Whereas, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has also seen an alarming increase in new COVID-19 infections, with new cases ranging from 700 to 1500 per day in late September, but spiking to 2,700 to 6,000 new cases per day from November 2-15; and

Whereas, as of November 15, 2020, the Pennsylvania Department of Health reports approximately 269,000 cases of COVID-19 within the Commonwealth, with 9,385 Pennsylvanians killed by the disease to date; and

Whereas, if the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania were an independent nation, as of November 15 it would have the 33rd most COVID cases in the world, higher than Portugal, Austria, Sweden, and Japan, among others; and

Whereas, the trend of a significantly increasing COVID-19 infection rate is mirrored nationwide, with other jurisdictions throughout the country contemplating various forms of stay at home or other directives in order to combat the spread of the disease; and

Whereas, locally, as noted by the Allegheny County Health Department, daily reported new cases

within the County ranged from 317 to an all-time record of 527 for the week of November 8-15, 2020; and

Whereas, since November 1, 2020, there have been 4,320 new cases of COVID-19 in Allegheny County residents, as well as 24 deaths from the disease; and

Whereas, as noted by Allegheny County Health Department Dr. Debra Bogen on November 15, “[t]he continued increase in new COVID cases is beyond concerning. This past week, I joined with the chief medical officers of our region’s health systems to talk about our growing concerns. Despite our cautionary messages, the number of cases is continuing to increase rapidly. While we are better prepared today than when we first began seeing cases in March, we must still be proactive in reducing the spread of the virus.”; and

Whereas, it is the judgment of Council that Dr. Bogen is correct, and that “doing nothing is no longer an option” as we endeavor to prevent our medical facilities from becoming overburdened by rapidly increasing numbers of new cases; and

Whereas, it is also the judgment of Council that caution is entirely justified in environments like courthouses and other government buildings that are open to the public, particularly in light of previous COVID outbreaks both in the Allegheny County Courthouse and in other similar locations such as the Beaver County and Washington County Courthouses; and

Whereas, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) indicates that self-quarantining is recommended for anyone for a period of 14 days from the date of their last exposure to an individual with COVID-19; and

Whereas, the CDC also indicates that, once symptoms manifest in an infected individual, it is not safe for them to be around others until (1) 10 days have elapsed since symptoms first appeared, and (2) 24 hours have elapsed without the infected individual experiencing a fever, and without the use of fever-reducing medications, and (3) the individual’s other COVID-19 symptoms are improving; and

Whereas, as a result of this CDC guidance, once exposed, an individual cannot return to work for at least 14 days, and should they develop symptoms, this period would grow to at least 24 days; and

Whereas, because the Office of County Council has only four employees, all of whom work closely together, one individual testing positive would inevitably result in the entire staff being quarantined, and should all four staff members develop symptoms, the Office of County Council would be effectively closed for nearly a month, at a minimum; and

Whereas, it is the judgment of Council that occasioning the risk of such a lengthy closure is unwise, insofar as it would significantly impair the function of the legislative branch of the County’s government; and

Whereas, it is further the judgment of Council that the Office of County Council possesses both personnel and equipment that are more than adequate to perform virtually all necessary day-to-day functions from remote locations, through the use of telephone call forwarding and the networked laptop computers which the County has issued to all employees within the Office of County Council; and

The Council of the County of Allegheny therefore hereby moves as follows:

Pursuant to the terms of this Motion and beginning on the fourth business day after adoption, all staff members within the Office of County Council are hereby directed to work remotely through January 19, 2021, subject to the following conditions:

- No staff member other than the Chief of Staff may be physically present in the Office of County Council except as expressly authorized by the terms of this Motion;
- All regular meetings shall be staffed in person by the Chief of Staff and the Chief Clerk;
- All committee meetings shall be staffed in person or remotely via conference call, Microsoft Teams, or other teleconferencing method at the discretion of the Chief of Staff;
- No more than two (2) staff members shall be physically present in the Office of County Council or in any room in which a meeting is taking place at any given time unless continuously maintaining a distance of at least six feet and wearing a mask;
- While working remotely, all staff members shall be required to keep their County-issued laptops with them and to undertake their normal work-related functions during business hours for the Office of County Council (8:30 a.m. through 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on designated County holidays), or as requested by the Chief of Staff in order to maintain appropriate office functions;
- Any staff member wishing to refrain from work activities on a given business day (or portion thereof) shall be required to use leave time consistent with existing County and Council policies, as they would if they were physically present in the Office of County Council;
- The policies and Rules of Council relating to staff conduct and function shall remain in force and effect throughout any period of working remotely, to the extent that they apply;
- Should any staff member need to be present in the Office of County Council in order to carry out one or more of their required duties, the staff member must inform the Chief of Staff of the need at least 24 hours in advance to the extent that doing so is possible, and shall remain in the Office of County Council only as long as is necessary to perform the necessary duty or duties;
- Under unusual circumstances and with prior notice to and approval of the President, the Chief of Staff may require the presence of up to two (2) additional staff members in the Office of County Council in order to address unforeseen circumstances, to the extent that doing so is necessary to perform the legislative or budgetary functions of Council.

The Council further moves that:

The Council hereby urges the Chief Executive, Controller, District Attorney, Sheriff, Treasurer and the Fifth Judicial District to consider taking additional similar actions to the extent that they are permitted by law, and provided that doing so does not endanger public health or safety.

PRIMARY SPONSOR: COUNCIL MEMBER HALLAM

CO-SPONSORS: COUNCIL MEMBERS BENNETT, PRIZIO and PALMOSINA