

**Local orders now being considered and previously
adopted at various times by Montgomery County Council
and the Council acting as the Board of Health**

I am a resident of Montgomery County.

I am a former state health department consultant and administrator and, for 22 years, a local health department director in Michigan. From 2008 until 2014 I was the Executive Director of the National Association of County and City Health Officials whose offices are located in Washington, D.C. and which supported the work of the nation's local health departments.

Since the introduction of the pandemic to the County earlier this year I have paid particular attention to the work of the County Executive, County Council, Health and Human Services Department, and Health Officer, Dr. Gayles, as this relates to the pandemic. As an interested citizen, I attended the first briefing of the Council by health department officials many months ago while such briefings were in person in Council chambers.

I know County elected officials will this week consider another set of recommendations affecting County life during the pandemic.

I wish to commend the manner in which the County Executive and Council have respectfully sought, received, and supported the science- and experience-based recommendations of our local health officials and, as well, adapted your responses to the pandemic over time as knowledge about its causes, transmission, and effects have matured.

I feel safer as a County resident because of your actions when I know they have been recommended by Dr. Gayles and his colleagues. Pandemics remind us of the need for public health professionals as part of the County workforce. They are professionals important at other times, too.

You have been continually faced with difficult decisions to protect the public and prevent the spread of illness and death. Assessments of conditions can be challenging. Data and inexperience may be incomplete. Recommendations by necessity will change as more is learned. Messaging these changes and the reasons for them is complicated. Local residents, businesses, and organizations may be asked or required to adopt and adapt behavior for their own protection and the protection of others. This can be difficult. It may provoke controversy. The balance between personal liberties and community protection are challenging to establish. Everyone may not agree with the fulcrum point. The reasons for your decisions may be poorly understood by others, sometimes contrary to their belief systems. Yet compliance with the behaviors asked for, or mandated, may be essential nonetheless, as a precondition for life in our community setting.

I've been pleased with the very public manner in which County elected and appointed officials have communicated with the public. I am particularly pleased with the support you have demonstrated and expressed for Dr. Gayles and his department's staff. In my own work I also experienced personal threats and calumny as I understand Dr. Gayles and other County officials

have been. This is tragic, uncomfortable and, unfortunately, increasingly common throughout the nation as the pandemic has become one more politicized yet shared experience.

Please continue to offer Dr. Gayles, his staff, and that of other County departments responding to the pandemic the resources they and their partners in the larger public health system require to mitigate and, hopefully, make less consequential the morbidity and mortality from this deadly infectious disease. These actions will increase the chances of bringing the pandemic under control more rapidly and prevent its unfortunate effects on community life.

Please continue to keep in mind the importance of the department's essential focus on preventing the spread of this and other diseases and ameliorating conditions which underlay poor health and disparate health outcomes in Montgomery County. Prevention is a priority as important as treating those who become ill. Unfortunately, prevention involves tasks and resources often less well understood and so typically receive less attention and commitment.

Please continue to model the behaviors you recommend so that more of us will follow your lead and practice.

Please continue to exercise and demonstrate well your own joint and non-partisan leadership. Continue to give priority to the various human needs of County residents as we struggle to cope and adapt to changing conditions. Please continue to set a good example for other Maryland counties by adopting and adapting recommendations, rules, and requirements to best serve our residents. Many of these residents are federal and state employees and elected officials on whom we also depend.

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