



RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

January 19, 2022

The Honorable Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr
Governor
State of Maryland 100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Governor Hogan:

We are the Montgomery County Maryland Government's Racial Equity and Social Justice Advisory Committee. **We strongly urge you to request from counties the reporting of and to include “American Indian or Alaska Native” as a category broken out from “Other” in COVID-19 online data products** at the state level, including measures such as **monthly and total cases, monthly and total mortality, and vaccination rates** by partial and full dosage.

There are 128,650 Marylanders who are American Indian or Alaska Native people as of the 2020 census. American Indian and Alaska Native people also have the highest health disparities when it comes to COVID-19: they are 1.7 times more likely to catch COVID-19, 3.5 times more likely to be hospitalized, and 2.4 times more likely to die when compared to non-Hispanic white people. However, Maryland does not report specific COVID-19 data for American Indian or Alaska Native people, nor does it require reporting of that data from counties. The relative size of a population is not a good enough justification for lack of data when there are such high potential disparities.

COVID-19 mitigation efforts for populations facing such high disparities rely on timely, specific data. American Indian communities, families, and individuals are unable to plan around constantly changing COVID-19 risks if the data do not exist. As a few examples: community-specific data on hospitalization rates might help someone provide the extra push that convinces their family member to go get the vaccine to protect their community. Community-specific data on changing infection rates might help individuals decide to take precautionary masking or help community members identify a local super-spreader event. Data is essential for identifying and mitigating COVID-19 disparities for American Indian and Alaska Native people.

Although the possibility of small cell data is often cited as a reason not to break out American Indian or Alaska Native data from “Other”, there are easily applied controls (often applied to far more sensitive data) that both provide communities with necessary data and prevent re-

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identification. For example, data products can be easily limited so that cross-tabulations are unavailable if the cell size would dip below a certain threshold. Regardless, the state should still require counties to report this data so that it is available for local and state decision-makers. This would allow the state to both acquire the data needed and implement automated controls, rather than having to decide on a case by case basis or, worse, having a blanket decision not to provide the needed data even when extant cell sizes have not justified collapsing data into “Other”.

Moreover, lumping American Indian and Alaska Native people under “Other” contributes to native invisibility, which runs counter to the goals of Your Honor’s proclamation of this month as American Indian Heritage Month. As Your Honor has stated, American Indian people are an essential and vibrant part of our communities today. Native invisibility in data products makes it far too easy for government officials on both sides of the aisle to ignore the needs and requests of American Indian communities.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

The Montgomery County Racial Equity and Social Justice Advisory Committee



Izola Shaw, Chair



Shane Lloyd, Vice Chair

cc: Marc Elrich, County Executive