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April 24, 2020

The Honorable Mike DeWine
Governor
Vern Riffe Center, 30th Floor
77 S. High St.
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Governor DeWine:

Thank you for your leadership during the COVID-19 crisis. Your quick and decisive decisions have undoubtedly saved many Ohio lives. I would like to discuss the four top issues that my constituents are raising with me along with your vision and expected action of the Minority Health Strike Force that you have created.

I know that you are considering many Ohioans to transition back to work on May 1, but I have reservations about this time frame of this move until several health guardrails are instituted. I would like to ask that you consider putting the following criteria in place: greater flexibility and expanded access to testing, increased testing supplies/kits, an Ohio Public Health order requiring all residents wear masks in public, clear, consistent guidance on mass gatherings throughout the state, and clear guidance and support on managing, testing, containment, and mitigation of COVID-19 at long term care facilities.

Too many of our constituents do not get health services from hospitals or primary care physicians. When capacity finally reaches adequate levels, it is critical that testing be made available where these vulnerable populations can access them – community health centers; Veterans Affairs facilities; pharmacies; mobile clinics; and other nontraditional locations, for example.

We also must prioritize access to personal protective equipment for our health care workers and those performing other essential duties, but as production increases, the state government should take steps to make sure that those products are widely available in all communities.

I appreciate your willingness to look at prison sentence reductions for low level offenders who are close to finishing their sentences. Persons of color make up an overwhelming majority of Ohio's prison populations, which has contributed to this virus's disproportionate impact on the minority community as a whole. I would like to discuss what further steps can be taken.

I want to commend you for creating the Minority Health Strike Force and recognizing the health disparities that exist due to COVID-19 because as you know the COVID-19 virus has disproportionately affected communities of color. The data we have suggests that the coronavirus has been especially hard on communities of color. Here in Ohio, Black Americans account for 12 percent of the state's population but 23.3 percent of Ohio's COVID-19 cases. This is, in large part, because of historical inequities in our health care system and the fact that many of our emergency responders and other frontline workers come from these populations and are particularly vulnerable. I want to speak with you about what your vision is for this task force is and want to ensure this group takes true action.

I thank you again for your steady leadership as Ohio continues to battle this COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joyce Beatty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress