



TOWNSHIP OF HAZLET

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DENNIS PINO
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Chief Administrative Officer

April 13, 2020

Governor Philip Murphy
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 001
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COVID-19: Volunteers and Unintended Consequences

Governor:

As an elected official in your neighboring town of Hazlet, I wish to laud your efforts in the fight against COVID-19. My fellow elected officials (noted below) join me in our unqualified support of your efforts, as well as those of our President, Donald Trump. In particular, the citizens of Hazlet share your enthusiasm for Volunteers joining this battle. Our town fortunately has many volunteer citizens who train and perform at levels rivaling the best paid professionals in our First Responder core. Our volunteer Fire and First Aid Squads perform 24/7/365 tirelessly and without ever asking for so much as a thank you. Our town is blessed.

When Superstorm Sandy challenged these Volunteer First Responders, they never faltered, not for a moment. This pandemic has created new issues of which you may not be aware. Hence the title of this letter: Volunteers and Unintended Consequences. We have had some of our police quarantined for exposure to COVID patients. They understand the risks of their job and while quarantined, they are paid through Workers' Compensation and/or PL 2020 Ch 9. They do not suffer economically while placing the health of themselves and clearly their families at risk. Absolutely appropriate and well thought out. Volunteers however, seem to fall through the cracks in our system.

No one ever imagined a pandemic where Volunteers would become the front line. Should Volunteers become ill from COVID, they too appear to be eligible for Workers' Compensation. As a "Volunteer," their compensation loss is at risk relative to their higher wage day jobs.

Further, they would be forced into the world of Workers' Compensation medical coverage. Yet that is not the greater issue for a Volunteer.

When a Volunteer EMT is exposed to COVID, as two of our Volunteers were recently, the Volunteers are sent into quarantine for 14 days. Given quarantine protocols, their families are also quarantined. Herein lies the conundrum. Quarantine is not necessarily "sick" for purposes of Workers' Compensation. **There is no safety net for Volunteers placed in quarantine.**

We have learned our Town is unable to provide any financial support to the Volunteers in quarantine, despite our willingness to do so. We have been advised by Counsel, that the Dept. of Community Affairs could sanction us for this action, as we do not have the authority to provide any economic support to a Volunteer rendered unable to work in their day job as a result of their volunteering for the town. Resultantly, our CPA firm could view such a sanction as adverse to the citizens and place a qualifying remark in our financial statements. A CPA note contained within an Annual Report could adversely impact our Bond rating, thereby raising the costs of any Bond to our citizens.

As a former Goldman Sachs banker, you can see our dilemma. The unintended message we are sending to all our Volunteers across the state is... if you get COVID-19 while volunteering... Good Luck... you volunteer at your own economic and health peril. The scenario we currently face in Hazlet is approximately 30% of our Volunteer EMTs are not taking COVID calls or riding, until the crisis is over. The town is now asking the remaining Volunteers to do even more 911 calls during the crisis, and **they are performing above all expectations.**

Why the drop-off in Volunteer EMTs? We have had one EMT told by his Police Chief superior, that if he rides as a Volunteer EMT, he cannot work for the Police in this neighboring town. Several employers in the area have made similar demands of our Volunteers. The remainder of the EMTs passing on these calls are afraid of being exposed. Quarantine risks alone could result in them not being able to pay their bills. Again, the town cannot assist them financially despite its willingness to do so. An extended illness would force them into Workers' Compensation. Once ill, there would be additional delays and paperwork to secure any assistance for simply being a good Samaritan. **I think we ask too much of our Volunteer First Responders.**

My calls to several people engaged at the state level offer an unacceptable answer. I have been told that the Fire and First Aid Squads need to "go paid." Not an answer to the immediate problem and beyond that, our taxpayers have absolutely no appetite for the increased taxes these services would require.

Senator Declan O'Scanlon and Assemblywoman Serena DiMaso (herself a riding Volunteer EMT) have been most diligent in trying to resolve these issues. What we have gleaned as the fastest path to resolution is *ask you to issue an Executive Order*. That order would allow towns to cover our Volunteers at risk, while the state resolves this problem longer term. *We urge you to issue such an Executive Order immediately.* Send a signal to the Volunteers in this fight that we will not abandon them should they be impacted while in the service of the state. I am confident our

citizens would support the town providing financial assistance to those volunteers servicing them in this time of crisis.

Last and certainly not least, our First Aid Squad, not unlike others in neighboring towns, has long served as an incubator for aspiring Doctors, Physician Assistants, Nurses and EMTs. You may not be aware that the testing service, *Pearson Vue*, that administers the nursing exam, has recently twice canceled all Nursing certification exams due to COVID issues. We have graduates of state accredited nursing programs whose exams are now pushed out past May. Brookdale Community College's January Nursing graduates alone are over 50 people. These are 50 nurses who could immediately be in the fight on the front lines of the pandemic. The lack of this exam has sidelined this potential resource, just when nurses are needed most.

Pearson Vue is a national service for the NCLEX exam. All states have been impacted. However, our research shows at least 8 states (including NY) have moved to a temporary certification for GRADUATES of accredited nursing programs until a certifying exam is available. Senator O'Scanlon and Assemblywoman DiMaso have been championing such a move in a bipartisan effort to move quickly. If Monmouth County has at least 50 new, aspiring nurses on the sideline, then the state must have hundreds of such resources. *Our citizens would implore you to make an Executive Order to enable these GRADUATES to perform as nurses ASAP.* As to NJ precedence on this matter, Supreme Court Chief Justice Rabner on April 6 has issued an order that 2020 graduates of accredited law schools may practice law while awaiting the next BAR exam. Clearly the need for nurses exceeds the need for lawyers in the pandemic.

In closing, as a former Navy SEAL, I understand battle and the chaos which ensues. We do not wish to burden you or suggest anything beyond our support of you in this matter. However, we feel obligated to bring these issues to your attention, as well as viable solutions. I would offer a saying we have in the SEAL Teams when facing overwhelming odds, "The only easy day was yesterday."

Hazlet is "all in, all the time" in defeating this pandemic. Our citizens are on your team! We await your assistance in these matters.

Very Respectfully,



Skip McKay

Skip McKay, Township Committeeman

Concurrence:

Michael Glackin, Mayor

Tara Corcoran-Clark, Deputy Mayor

Scott Aagre, Township Committeeman

Michael C. Sachs, Township Committeeman

Cc: Senator DeClan O'Scanlon

Assemblywoman Serena DiMaso Esq.