

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 17, 2020

Governor Ron DeSantis
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis,

We write to urge you to finally take strong action to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus in Florida. We ask that you immediately impose a statewide mask order and stay-at-home orders recommended by public health officials in parts of the state where the outbreak is raging. By failing to reopen our state in the safe, smart, and step-by-step manner that you promised, and by ignoring CDC gating criteria, our state may be forced into a statewide economic shutdown, either by your order or simply because Floridians and visitors do not feel safe.

As you know, the state hit record high numbers of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the past week—including more than 15,000 positive cases, a nationwide record, this past Sunday. Florida is now the global epicenter of this pandemic. The daily positivity rate has ranged from 11.25 percent to 18.46 percent over the past two weeks, consistently exceeding CDC gating criteria of 10 percent. Florida hospitals report that 54 of their intensive care units are full, up from 44 one week ago. Over the past week, Florida reported its highest daily COVID-19 deaths twice and averaged 90 deaths per day. These are devastating trends, and we are concerned that you have neglected to take any meaningful action to bring the outbreak in our state under control.

We urge you to take immediate action pursuant to public health expert recommendations to slow the spread of the virus in our communities. We ask that you follow CDC guidance regarding the return to community mitigation. In May, the CDC advised:

Given the potential for a rebound in the number of cases or level of community transmission, a low threshold for reinstating more stringent mitigation standards will be essential. The decision to reinstate community mitigation strategies will undoubtedly be very difficult and will require careful thought to define an evidence-based monitoring strategy and specific guidance for these decisions.

To our knowledge, there has been no effort to develop a strategy that would not only help you navigate these difficult decisions but would also help all Floridians develop expectations about the challenges ahead.

Now we are facing uncontrolled outbreaks across the state that have resulted in long lines for testing, delayed test results, barriers to effective contact tracing, and that jeopardize the safe

reopening of our schools. By delaying steps like a statewide mask order and targeted stay-at-home orders, by even one more day, additional business closures and their devastating impacts on Florida's economy and the livelihoods of our constituents may be necessary.

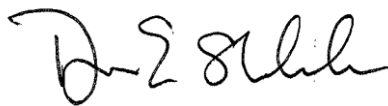
Further, a stay-at-home order should be accompanied by building up testing capacity, contact tracing, and other tools to prevent further spread and the need for future stay-at-home orders in the weeks and months ahead.

There is no doubt that issuing a stay-at-home order is a difficult decision. Closing the economy again would be painful, but that pain pales in comparison to the tragedy of losing thousands more Floridians, of watching our loved ones suffer through debilitating illness and possibly life-long health issues, or worse, watching over a phone screen as they die alone in a strained hospital system. And to be clear, if we continue with the rate of infection we currently have in Florida, our economy will contract and shutter on its own, needlessly subjecting Floridians to both lost jobs and wages and preventable death and illness.

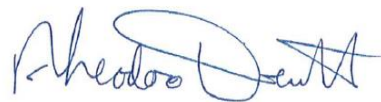
As members of Congress, we stand ready to support Florida's response and recovery through this health crisis, including necessary support for Florida's workers and small businesses. In May, we passed the Heroes Act to provide additional resources and economic relief, including funding for local governments, direct cash assistance to Florida families, and an extension of unemployment benefits. While we do not know the full economic toll the pandemic will have on our state, we cannot pretend that jeopardizing the lives of Floridians by continuing our current course will somehow protect our economy.

Governor DeSantis, our window of opportunity is rapidly closing. Please act before it is too late.

Sincerely,



Donna E. Shalala
Member of Congress



Ted Deutch
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
Member of Congress



Charlie Crist
Member of Congress



Kathy Castor
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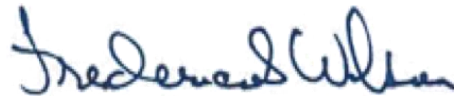
Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress



Al Lawson Jr.
Member of Congress



Lois Frankel
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Frederica Wilson
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