



Dear Friend --

As you probably know, while most of “New York State on PAUSE” remains in effect until at least May 28th, as of today, Friday May 15th, some regions of New York State, including the two regions that include my Assembly District, both Tompkins and Cortland Counties, will be able to begin Phase I Re-Opening. This means the easing of restrictions on in-person workforce at certain non-essential businesses and other entities, following region-specific plans with guidance from the state. I don’t know anyone, myself included, who isn’t glad to know that, since these two regions -- Central New York and the Southern Tier -- have met the various criteria, in terms of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, hospital capacity and testing and contact tracing capability, we can now begin a very cautious process of re-opening, one phase at a time.

The list of industries reopening in the various phases and safety guidelines for those reopening are linked [here](#), but it’s important to remember that Phase I that begins today only applies to Construction, Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting, Retail (limited to curbside or in-store pickup or drop-off) Manufacturing and Wholesale Trade. This re-opening MUST be done with all the precautions in place – physical distancing, masks, hand-washing and sanitizers, etc.. I’ve spoken to a number of residential home builders, who I know are eager to begin the season, and they tell me they’ve been making plans, based on industry and state guidance, to make sure their workers will be safe as they get back on the job. I know manufactures and retailers have been doing the same – and, in fact, all open or partially-opened businesses are required to have a COVID-19-safe workplace or be subject to closing.

The Governor has made clear that if we see a problematic uptick in new cases in the region over that two-week period, we will have to pull back and add more restrictions to Phase I, until Phase II can be done without an unacceptable uptick in cases.

To be clear, Phase I is just about allowing some more business activity and not about all of us resuming our pre-COVID public activity level. The rest of us not involved in these business sectors, will need to continue abiding by stay-at-home orders, socially isolating, limiting outings to essential business, such as doctor’s appointments and pharmacy needs, grocery shopping, pick-up of takeout food, etc., with all the normal precautions of masks, hand-washing, etc. Of course, it is fine to be outside in our yards or in less-travelled trails and parks, provided we practice distancing and have a mask handy in case of situations where distancing may not be possible. We have to continue to not gather in groups or get together with people outside our household.

I understand, we all have cabin fever and want to resume something approaching normal, but it’s important to be clear that this new coronavirus is still out there; it has not gone away; it is highly transmissible -- and it is still deadly. If we want to keep our case numbers low -- with no fatalities, fortunately, in either Cortland and Tompkins Counties, so far -- we will need to continue being patient, and as careful as we have been up until now, as we wait for effective treatments and, let us hope, a vaccine.

As we continue this life-saving discipline, let us celebrate the great care we have taken and be grateful that we have helped to prevent spread and fatalities here, as we respond to the needs of so many who have negatively affected by -- and I’ll quote Paul Krugman again – “putting our economy into an induced coma.” We made a

very deliberate decision to save lives, which I believe was the right decision. If we can begin to open up with as much care and thought as we shut down, with the needed support from the federal and state governments, we can continue to protect lives, while reviving as much of our economy as feasible. As always, I remain grateful to live in and represent communities that have fully understood the threat of this terrible illness, and I thank you all again for being willing to make the changes necessary to safeguard your own health and that of everyone in our communities. We will get through this, and, I am hopeful, come out with greater wisdom and compassion on the other side.

The Census

You may have received a mailing inviting you to respond to the Census. If you haven't responded, it is not too late to do so. According to the New York State Comptroller, the latest numbers show New York ranks six (6) points BELOW the national average when it comes to filling out the 2020 Census. It's critically important that all New Yorkers participate. The results have significant consequences, from our state's representation in Congress to federal funding for important programs that build roads, fund schools and provide health care. Make sure your voice is heard. You can use the following link to complete the survey and get more information about the [Census](#).

Possible Cuts to Education Funding

A number of you have contacted me concerned about the prospect of cuts to school aid, by as much as 20%. I agree with you that this would be terrible, and have been pushing for increased taxes on the very wealthy which would allow for more funding for our under-funded public schools. In the budget recently completed, the Assembly Majority proposed an increase in the tax rates for very wealthy New Yorkers, those making \$5 million a year or more; however this proposal did not make it into the final budget. That said, even that proposal would only raise about \$355 million in this state fiscal year, and so would barely make a dent in our current budget hole of \$10-15 billion, and stave off deep cuts. Keep in mind that, if we are able to pass a state tax increase, that \$355 million would be used to support many areas, such as hospitals and nursing homes, food assistance, etc. So, while I am continuing to push for a strong tax proposal, I know that we will only be able to do significant mitigation of Education cuts if the federal government passes another package of disaster aid that includes aid to states and local governments. If you haven't already done so, I urge you to contact all three of your federal representatives and urge them to enact the \$3 trillion [HEROES Act, H.R. 6800](#). Their contact information is listed at the bottom of this newsletter.

COVID-19 Survey of Nursing Homes, from AARP

I was recently contacted by the state AARP (the American Association of Retired Persons) asking if I would include their [survey](#) of skilled nursing facilities in my newsletter, which asks about whether anyone -- residents or staff -- have had COVID-19 and what steps the facility is taking to protect people. Given the current concerns about COVID outbreaks in nursing facilities, it seems to me like a good idea. If you have a loved one in a skilled nursing facility in Tompkins or Cortland County, you may be interested in calling the facility to ask these questions. The responses you would record in the online survey would be relayed directly to state AARP and, and since they will be doing this survey statewide, they would be able to get a clearer picture of what's happening in these critical-care facilities here in my district and around the state, and that information could help create better state and even federal policy.

Unemployment Insurance

The Department of Labor is continuing to streamline its system as it processes claims. They have recently completely re-done their website, including revised, clear guidance for those applying for Unemployment

Benefits. If you have filed or are thinking of filing, please see the updates on the DOL website [here](#). My office is continuing to assist those having difficulty with filing for unemployment insurance benefits or those who have filed but have been waiting too long for a determination. If you are stuck in your application or anticipate an urgent financial situation in the near future if you do not receive benefits, please contact me. Since my staff and I are working remotely, an email to liftonb@nyassembly.gov is the fastest route, but we also pick up phone messages every day. If you do call my office, please use the district office number at (607) 277-8030, and leave a detailed message, including your complete contact information.

Local Food & Other Emergency Resources

Food pantries in [Cortland County](#), via Cortland 2-1-1, are listed [here](#).

In Cortland County, for emergency needs for Temporary Assistance, Emergency Cash and Housing Assistance you can call the Cortland County Department of Social Services at (607) 753-3423.

Food pantries in [Tompkins County](#), via Tompkins 2-1-1, are listed [here](#).

In Tompkins County, for emergency needs for Temporary Assistance, Emergency Cash and Housing Assistance, you can call the Tompkins County Department of Social Services at (607) 274-5345.

For Assistance, to Donate or Volunteer you can visit one of these websites or call:

[Cortland County United Way](#) (607)756-5639

[Food Bank of Central New York](#) (866) 839-7304 (serving Cortland County)

[United Way of Tompkins County](#) (607) 272-6286

[Food Bank of the Southern Tier](#) (607) 796-6061 (serving Tompkins County)

Mental Health

For help in a crisis, you can call the [Cortland](#) Mental Health Clinic at (607) 758-6100 or the [Ithaca](#) Crisis Line (which provides suicide prevention and crisis services) at (607) 272-1616.

Mental health support can also be found by visiting the website of the [NYS Office of Mental Health](#) or by calling the OMH Emotional Support Helpline at 1-844-863-9314. This helpline provides free and confidential support, helping callers experiencing increased anxiety due to the coronavirus emergency, and is staffed by volunteers, including mental health professionals, who have received training in crisis counseling.

Additional resources from the Mental Health Association of New York State (MHANYS) are found [here](#).

General COVID-19-related updates and resources can be found using the contacts below.

[NYS Department of Health](#) 1-888-364-3065

[Cortland County Department of Health](#) (607) 753-5036

[Tompkins County Department of Health](#) (607) 274-6604

I'm hoping for the best, needless to say, as we begin our cautious re-opening. Perhaps we will be a model for the state and country on how to re-open carefully without endangering the health of the many vulnerable people -- including, we now understand, children -- in our midst. Given the history of this Assembly district of leading the state in many areas, it wouldn't surprise me if we did become such a model. I hope you will stay safe -- and help keep others safe, as well. Thank you.

Best -- Barbara

Find other messages from Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton at her [Newsroom](#).

Contact Information for Federal Representatives:

White House: Call 202-456-1111 "comments" or 202-456-1414 "switchboard" or send email using <https://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/>

Congressmember Tom Reed: Corning (607) 654-7566; Washington, D.C. (202) 225-3161 or send email using <https://reed.house.gov/contact/>

Congressmember Anthony Brindisi: Binghamton (607) 242-0200; Washington, D.C. (202) 225-3665 or send email using <https://brindisi.house.gov/contact/email-me>

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand: Syracuse (315) 448-0470; Washington, D.C. (202) 224-4451 or send email using <https://www.gillibrand.senate.gov/contact/email-me>

Senator Chuck Schumer: Binghamton (607) 772-6792; Washington, D.C. (202) 224-6542 or send email using <https://www.schumer.senate.gov/contact/email-chuck>