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Senate of Pennsylvania

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May 28, 2020

The Honorable Joseph Scarnati
President Pro Tempore, Senate of Pennsylvania

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Dear Senator Scarnati,

Recent events in the House of Representatives have drawn attention to gaps in the General Assembly's internal coronavirus response procedures. As the leaders of this Commonwealth, we have a responsibility to set the example for how organizations should respond, and we have the obligation to protect our members and staff from this highly transmissible disease. I am writing to request a change to the Rules of the Senate as well as to request immediate testing availability for our members and staff who think they may have been impacted by the COVID-19 virus.

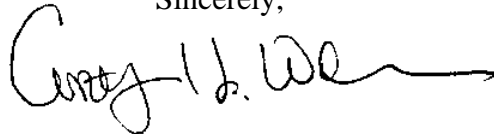
When a member of my Harrisburg staff exhibited symptoms consistent with COVID-19 on March 13, 2020, he was immediately sent to his healthcare provider for testing. Additionally, our caucus asked his immediate co-workers to self-isolate, cleaned the office, and informed the Republican caucus administrator. Thankfully, my staff member tested negative; however, that information led to the Senate taking the necessary precautions of delaying a planned session week while awaiting test results. That procedures should be the standard, and should be expanded to include both chambers and other state workers who frequent the Capitol Complex.

In the near future, I will be introducing a resolution to amend the Rules of the Senate to include a temporary rule mandating disclosure of potential exposure to COVID-19 to all four caucuses and the Department of General Services. I recognize that a policy adopted by the Chief Clerk on May 4, 2020 addresses this topic in an appropriate manner, however it does not require disclosure of a potential exposure to parties outside of our chamber. As the budget and other important bills have been negotiated over the past several weeks, staff and members from all four caucuses have interacted with each other in person, increasing the risk for chain transmission.

Additionally, I would like to formally request that the Senate make testing available to every employee who requests it based on possible chain transmission resulting from this incident. I'd also request that you urge leadership in the House and the Department of General Services to do the same. It is incumbent on us as leaders of the Commonwealth to ensure the health and safety of our own essential workers in Harrisburg.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter of health and safety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony H. Williams", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Anthony H. Williams
State Senator – 8th District