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March 25, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington DC 20500

Dear President Trump,

I write to urge you to refrain from any action that would prematurely suspend or reverse the March 16, 2020 White House guidance entitled “15 Days to Slow the Spread” of the novel coronavirus, which causes the disease COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> A hasty relaxation of those science-based guidelines, especially social distancing, would only serve to increase the harm the virus is causing the American people and our economy.

The March 16 guidance was informed by the cautionary tale of other countries such as Italy, which were too late in instituting major interventions against the coronavirus, doing so only after significant community spread. Despite boasting a well-developed health care system,<sup>2</sup> Italy has seen an explosion of coronavirus infections — over 69,000 as of March 24 — straining the finite resources of its hospital system,<sup>3</sup> because it did not do enough to slow the spread of the coronavirus.<sup>4</sup> The Italian experience — and the science — tell us that prematurely relaxing social distancing measures in the United States will result in more infections, which could exceed the capacity of our health care system to provide care for those suffering from COVID-19 and others in immediate need of medical attention.

The American people share your desire to get back to work and return to their lives. Social distancing is difficult and challenging both to individuals and our economy. But your

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Coronavirus (COVID-19)*, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Jason Horowitz *et al.*, *Italy, Pandemic's New Epicenter, Has Lessons for the World*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 21, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/21/world/europe/italy-coronavirus-center-lessons.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Statista, *Number of Coronavirus (COVID-19) active cases, recoveries, and deaths in Italy as of March 24, 2020*, (last updated Mar. 24, 2020), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1102808/coronavirus-cases-by-status-italy/>.

<sup>4</sup> Jason Horowitz *et al.*, *Italy, Pandemic's New Epicenter, Has Lessons for the World*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 21, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/21/world/europe/italy-coronavirus-center-lessons.html>.

assessment that the “cure cannot be worse than the problem itself” presents a false dichotomy.<sup>5</sup> Health experts, including from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), have projected that easing or lifting social distancing before it has had a chance to curb the spread of the coronavirus will result in millions more Americans contracting it. Our estimated 925,000 staffed hospital beds, one-tenth of which are reserved for the critically ill, cannot absorb a dramatic spike in COVID-19 cases into the millions.<sup>6</sup> And further spread of the coronavirus, resulting in more illness, hospitalizations, and deaths will only *worsen* our economic situation.

Just one day prior to your statement that you wanted the country “opened up and just raring to go by Easter,”<sup>7</sup> Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams argued that it was time for Americans to strictly follow the March 16 social distancing guidelines, rather than ease back on them. Dr. Adams ominously warned: “I want America to understand this week, it is going to get bad.”<sup>8</sup> I am deeply concerned that you have not committed to follow Dr. Adams’ advice or the recommendations of the public health officials on the White House Coronavirus Task Force that are set forth in the March 16 guidance.<sup>9</sup>

I urge you not to bypass science- and evidence-based interventions for short-sighted economic benefit. Doing so will only prolong the life of the pandemic, steepen the U.S. infection curve, and risk the emergence of new “hot-spots” across the country. I implore you to take no action to suspend or otherwise relax the March 16 guidance unless all members of the White House Coronavirus Task Force concur with that decision. In particular, the American people deserve to know that any changes to this guidance have the support of Response Coordinator Deborah Birx, Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Robert Redfield, and National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony Fauci.

Every person can play a key role in defeating our common but invisible enemy — the coronavirus — but only if we take to heart data and the recommendations of public health experts. All new physicians take the Hippocratic Oath, in which they commit to “first do no harm.” I strongly urge you to follow this same principle by issuing no new or revised coronavirus guidance that contradicts the well-informed views of those public health experts

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<sup>5</sup> Maggie Haberman and David E. Sanger, *Trump Says Coronavirus Cure Cannot ‘Be Worse Than the Problem Itself,’* N.Y. Times (Mar. 23, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-restrictions.html>.

<sup>6</sup> American Hospital Association, *Fast Facts on U.S. Hospitals, 2020*, (Jan. 31, 2020), <https://www.aha.org/statistics/fast-facts-us-hospitals>.

<sup>7</sup> Zeke Miller and Darlene Superville, *‘Packed churches’: Trump says he wants the country to open by Easter. Others in the government aren’t echoing agreement,* Chicago Tribune (Mar. 24, 2020), <https://www.chicagotribune.com/coronavirus/ct-nw-coronavirus-trump-restrictions-reopen-20200324-mgnfnxy3xvqzpcynflxouaga-story.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Rebecca Shabad, *Surgeon general has coronavirus warning: ‘This week it’s going to get bad,’* NBC News (Mar 23, 2020), <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/surgeon-general-has-coronavirus-warning-week-it-s-going-get-n1166421>.

<sup>9</sup> President Donald J. Trump, *Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force in Press Briefing*, The White House (Mar. 24, 2020), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-briefing-9/>.

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around you. If you fail to heed the experts' advice, you will be responsible for the needless deaths of potentially hundreds of thousands or even millions of Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward J. Markey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "E".

Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator