



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

NYS Senate Republican Conference Calls for Regional Reopening Timeline

PAMELA HELMING April 22, 2020



Albany, NY — Members of the New York State Senate Republican Conference today called on Governor Cuomo -- who finally heard their calls to begin a responsible, regional re-opening of New York -- to provide data within a week on which of the state's economic regions meet the CDC's Phase 1 standards to restart business.

These assessments must be released to the public so that parts of the state can begin to recover from the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic in a safe way.

Governor Cuomo must include the state Department of Health, local departments of Health, local officials, local businesses, and industry leaders in this process.

While the Governor allows the experts to work on the data, he must also take on the state's broken unemployment system. Over 1.2 million New Yorkers filed for unemployment as of April 16 and despite the voluntary efforts of state workers to handle the unprecedented volume of calls, unemployed New Yorkers cannot get through to the agency, have not received call-backs, and have not received needed checks.

"New Yorkers have made tremendous sacrifices to protect the health of others, and we applaud every doctor, nurse, health care worker, law enforcement officer, EMT, grocer, trucker, farmer, and all frontline workers who have kept us going through this pandemic. While every region of this state shared in the same economic and emotional sacrifice, every region of this state luckily hasn't experienced the same health crisis. It is time to bring people hope and prosperity under the science-based guidelines set forth by the CDC and restart parts of the economy in a smart way. We expect Governor Cuomo will be responsive to this call to deliver the data to see which of our regions meet the CDC guidelines to begin Phase 1," said Republican Leader John J. Flanagan.

"Our offices are also dealing with an extraordinary volume of calls from hopeless New Yorkers, laid off, staying at home to protect others, but who need to put food on the table today. Although it is reassuring that all individuals will be paid back to the date of their unemployment, our constituents cannot continue to pay their bills without receiving their benefits now. We appreciate state workers who volunteered to make calls seven days a week, but it is not enough to deal with the volume of New Yorkers who need immediate assistance and the Governor must address this issue," Leader Flanagan added.

The Governor on Tuesday embraced Senate Republicans' calls and President Trump's Opening Up America Again Guidelines, endorsed by Doctors Fauci, Birx and Redfield, which creates three phases for safely opening the economy. Each phase contains gating criteria and instructions for individuals and employers to maintain safety both in and out of the workplace.

The impact of the coronavirus has varied widely across the state. Only 7% of statewide coronavirus hospitalizations are within areas outside of New York City and its suburbs. The Governor's regional assessments should consider cities separately from less dense populations within economic regions.

"Relaunching our economy based on science and safety is the right thing to do for businesses in our state, and we hope the Governor heeds our call to unveil the data next week. There's no reason why major chains selling a product can be open, and a mom and pop selling the same product should be shuttered. We can follow the CDC guidelines, listen to the voices of local officials, local health departments, and local businesses to get the economy started safely. It's also incumbent upon Governor Cuomo to fix his unemployment agency. People laid off due to forced shutdowns cannot wait any longer to put food on the table," said Deputy Leader Joe Griffo.

"A one-size fits all approach across the state will not work. I am asking the Governor to release regional data immediately. My number one priority is keeping people safe and planning for the reopening of the economy. Part of that is working to support the individuals, farms, and businesses that have been devastated by the COVID pandemic. The numbers are clear, our state economy is literally on PAUSE because of COVID and it is devastating family finances and job-creating businesses. My office has personally assisted over 600 residents with unique unemployment claims and numerous small businesses and farm issues. We continue to work with local businesses and the local Congressional

delegation to secure help from the Federal Small Business Administration so they can weather this storm. It is important that we restart our economy in a smart and safe way,” said Senator Pam Helming.

“A regional approach can thoughtfully balance the unique public health and economic challenges of various communities. We have a chance to not only get New Yorkers back to work, but to also reshape our state’s economy moving forward. And while we recognize that most sectors of our economy will look dramatically different because of the virus, there are also major state constraints on businesses that predate the pandemic – such as stifling tax and regulatory burdens. Regional plans will allow us to assess local health considerations and identify economic opportunities as we emerge protecting lives and livelihoods,” said Senator Rob Ortt.

“Maintaining public health needs to be our top priority, but my office is being inundated with calls from desperate residents -- employers and employees -- who are watching their life savings dry up, and they deserve a plan of action. Local community stakeholders and public health experts, not government bureaucrats, need to have a voice in the process in establishing a reopening plan that works for the Hudson Valley. Our neighbors have made tremendous sacrifices to promote public health, but they need to know that a plan is in the works that will effectively move our community forward as soon as the time is right,” said Senator Sue Serino.

“We thank the hardworking men and women at the Department of Labor who are working overtime to process claims, but for this to be painted as nothing more than an ‘annoying delay’ is completely out of touch and a slap in the face to hardworking New Yorkers. Most people stuck waiting for their benefits are currently unemployed through no fault of their own and they have gone weeks without receiving a dime. This is about people’s livelihoods. They’re trying to put food on their tables. Enough is enough, the state needs to resolve the

problem immediately,” Senator Serino added.

“A common-sense approach to reopening the state, starting with those areas where population density and rate of infection are lowest, is the best way to safely get our economy restarted. There is no desire to ‘flip a switch’ and go back to the same practices as before this crisis. The continued forced lockdown of our economy will lead to more poverty, more homelessness, more addiction issues, and poor healthcare outcomes. So getting people back to work and beginning the process of reopening is as critical to our health and safety as it is to our economic future,” said Senator George M. Borrello.

“While I encourage all New Yorkers to take the necessary precautions to protect their health and the health of their families and neighbors, it is time for the state to plan for the reopening of our economy. We must use the latest information and guidance from the CDC and other health experts in determining how best to allow regions of our state to return to work as soon as safe and appropriate. It is also imperative that the administration take all necessary steps to immediately fix problems within the unemployment insurance system. Citizens are depending on the benefits they are due to provide for their families. To have these benefits delayed any further is unacceptable,” said Senator Patrick Gallivan.

“It is imperative that we get our economy moving and getting people back to work. When it comes to reopening Upstate New York’s economy, our first priority must be to continue to take every measure necessary to prevent a second wave spike in COVID-19 cases. I support taking a regional and incremental approach along with increasing testing for those who may have the virus, antibody testing, and contact tracing. We should work in every way possible to ensure that every business adheres to all the safety and social distancing guidelines. Until the disease is eradicated, we will need to closely monitor this each step of the way as more businesses reopen and be ready to mitigate any uptick in the contagion,” said Senator Jim Tedisco.

“New York has been hit the hardest not only by the virus’s impact on our health and safety, but especially on our economy. Even before the pandemic, New York’s economy was behind the curve and already floundering. We don’t want to go back to the old economy where 189,000 people last year and over one million in the past decade left the state. In a multitude of negative economic rankings, New York ranks number one or close to the top. That’s why, once this COVID-19 crisis stabilizes, I will continue to work with my colleagues in a non-partisan way to shine a bright light on this population loss that’s been particularly felt in our Upstate areas because it’s not just the simplistic excuse that it’s the ‘weather’ as to why people are leaving in droves, it’s the lack of a legislative agenda that incentivizes a prolific economy,” Senator Tedisco added.

“In addition to the tragic loss of life and sickness caused by the Coronavirus outbreak, countless small businesses and millions of unemployed New Yorkers have felt its staggering economic impacts. These are real people who need our help. I’ve been saying that a smart, sensible, regional reopening plan is what’s urgently needed to stabilize our economy, get people back to work, and provide a lifeline to small businesses that are on the verge of collapse. We can do this smartly, sensibly, regionally and with proper safeguards. But make no mistake: we do need to re-open New York and restore our economy as quickly as feasible because there are real people suffering,” Senator Daphne Jordan said.