



April 13, 2020

Colorado General Assembly
Colorado State Capitol
200 East Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203

Denver City Council
City and County Building
1437 Bannock Street
Denver, CO 80202

Regional Transportation District
Board of Directors
1660 Blake Street
Denver, CO 80202

Dear Members of the Colorado General Assembly, Denver City Council, and RTD Board:

I would like to start by thanking our direct service shelter and homeless services providers for their incredible hard work, sacrifice, and unwavering dedication to providing support and shelter to our communities' most vulnerable neighbors during this unprecedented time. Their commitment is deeply appreciated.

As you know, on March 5, 2020, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's (CDPHE) public health laboratory confirmed the first presumptive positive novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) test result in Colorado. Since then, the number of confirmed cases has continued to climb as more communities throughout the State have been affected by the disease. I verbally declared a disaster emergency on March 10, 2020, and have issued a statewide stay at home order until April 26, 2020 to prevent and limit the spread of COVID-19 and, ultimately, save lives.

I'd like to commend the efforts of Mayors, local leaders, and community advocates to help provide additional capacity to our shelter system and assist with reducing the spread of COVID-19 among our state's most vulnerable residents. In addition, we applaud the efforts of the private sector in helping address this issue. Our hope is that if more Colorado businesses do their part, we can expand access to non-traditional shelter beds for more individuals living without a permanent home.

My administration, along with other State, local, and federal authorities, has taken a wide array of actions to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, prevent further spread, and protect against overwhelming our health care resources. To that end, we acknowledge that people without housing and those that serve them each day are disproportionately at risk of the disease. We also recognize that social distancing or stay at home orders for mitigation are difficult to implement or impracticable in many shelters. We are committed to continuing to work with providers to ensure they can prevent and limit the spread of COVID-19 among the populations they serve by following the guidance provided by the administration and CDPHE. Therefore, I am committed to taking the following action:

1. Mobilizing immediately 250 Colorado National Guard (CONG) members to support existing shelters in the City and County of Denver with staffing shortages for those who are experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Providing planners from the CONG to support local emergency operation centers in other Colorado communities that the state designates.
3. Deploying the CONG to help stand up an expansion of capacity through new shelters through the use of recreation centers, hotels, or motels, if requested.
4. Engaging local motels, hotels, and event venue operators to seek their support in providing rooms to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. To that end, I have also written an open letter to motel and hotel owners encouraging them to join in this effort by providing relief beds, provided here as a separate attachment.
5. Deploying resources, as part of our medical surge, to increase hospital capacity for those who need medical care and ensuring that those experiencing homelessness have access to those resources.
6. Continuing to ensure the Homeless Task Force is meeting weekly with local leaders, providers, and advocates to inform and coordinate local and state efforts, providing webinars and guidance on state and federal actions.
7. Deploying emergency resources through various state agencies. The State has allocated emergency resources to assist communities in deploying strategies to decompress shelters and make available non-congregate options for the unhoused.
8. Assisting those who serve unhoused populations access personal protective gear.

Additionally, I encourage all communities to consider using a greater number of smaller shelters that are able to comply with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and public health guidelines as they will offer more protection to guests and staff against the spread of the disease, than larger shelters that are a danger to residents. I am not willing to use the Colorado National Guard (CONG) to support a large consolidated shelter as it conflicts with the social distancing guidelines contained in the state's updated Public Health Order and would be very dangerous for some of our most vulnerable Coloradans, putting them at greater risk of contracting

COVID-19. I also hope the use of the CONG for existing shelters is a temporary strategy as we develop a more sustainable solution for long-term recovery from this health crisis.

Again, I appreciate your hard work and continued partnership as we respond to this unprecedented event. Only together can we protect the health and safety of all Coloradans. We remain committed to working closely with local leaders and shelter providers to advance innovative solutions that meet the needs of residents while also reducing the risk of spreading COVID-19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jared Polis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jared" and last name "Polis" clearly distinguishable.

Jared Polis
Governor