

GLOUCESTER COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

May 12, 2020

The Honorable Stephen M. Sweeney
N.J. Senate President
935 Kings Highway, Suite 400
West Deptford, NJ 0808

The Honorable Craig J. Coughlin
N.J. Assembly Speaker
569 Rahway Ave.
Woodbridge, NJ 07095

Dear Senate President Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Coughlin:

We write to request that the New Jersey State Legislature intervene and assist to help high school seniors, throughout the great State of New Jersey, participate in some form of an in-person graduation ceremony.

As you are aware, Governor Murphy's Executive Order 107, issued March 21st, prohibits gatherings for parties and celebrations, which includes all in-person graduation ceremonies. Guidance on Virtual Graduation Celebrations, issued by the Department of Education on May 8th, offered a number of ways to celebrate this year's graduating class. However, these recommendations fall far short of honoring the senior members of the Class of 2020 in appropriate and traditional ways.

As school leaders we channel the voice of every high school senior from Gloucester County who is poised and ready to graduate in June. We advocate for our young men and women in an effort to provide them with a proper closure to what has become an indescribable senior year. We advocate for their parents, who have looked forward to the day their babies walk across their high school's stage to receive a diploma. So, we humbly ask for your assistance so that we can conduct our own in-person ceremonies in a way that abides by aggressive and voluntary social distancing measures recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Our high school seniors are confused, frustrated and angry over the many executive orders, public statements and contradictory messages issued by many local, state and federal officials. Contradictions our students see for themselves through media channels and personal experiences. Our seniors have been told it is unsafe to conduct in-person graduation ceremonies yet they bear witness to seemingly endless lines of law-abiding citizens gathering outside liquor stores, big box home improvement retailers, and membership-only warehouse clubs. They see adults, children and their peers wear mandatory face masks and practice the CDC's six-foot social distancing measures every time they step foot in a grocery store, post office, pharmacy or take-out restaurant. They have been made aware that public parks, golf courses and beaches are now open. And, they hear Governor Murphy recite countless times that these recommendations are designed to keep us safe and are based in science. Yet, our high school seniors fail to see the logic, fairness and consistency in these often opposing, contradictory and hypocritical measures in relative to the prohibition of in-person high school graduation ceremonies.

We applaud Governor Murphy and the State Legislature for putting the health and well-being of our citizens first. Your empathy for the sick and care for all of New Jersey's sons and daughters is



GLOUCESTER COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS



admirable, undeniable and our community stands with you in cooperation of safety measures that discourage the spread of this virus. What we humbly ask is that we conduct in-person ceremonies that abide by the same restrictions that permit our families, colleagues and children to enter liquor stores, big box home improvement retailers, and membership-only warehouse clubs.



We humbly ask that you consider authorizing school districts to conduct voluntary socially-distant in-person graduation ceremonies, similar to the ceremony conducted by the United States Air Force Academy. The Academy's beautiful in-person ceremony last month demonstrated what is possible. Cadets stayed minimally six feet from one another during the processional and throughout the duration of the ceremony. The elements of a traditional graduation were present, yet students remained in their seats when degrees were conferred. The entire ceremony was streamed live in order to prohibit public attendance.



We have complete and total confidence that our young men and women, and New Jersey's future teachers, medical professionals, engineers, service men and women and leaders can and will abide by the CDC's recommendations to aggressively practice social distancing measures throughout our respective graduation ceremonies. We give our assurance that we can conduct solemn ceremonies and incorporate the safety measures recommended by the CDC. We are confident that we can rival the United States Air Force Academy's ceremony and incorporate the same safety measures practiced daily by New Jerseyans. We ask you for the opportunity to conduct these ceremonies in June and assure every one of our seniors the opportunity to close their senior year with a sense of normalcy and in the dignified and ceremonial way they have earned.



Thank you for your tireless efforts on behalf of New Jersey's citizens and thank you for your consideration of this request on behalf of our students.



Very truly yours,

Superintendents Representing All of Gloucester County's Public High Schools



Nikolaos C. Koutsogiannis
Clayton Public Schools

John Horchak, III
Clearview Regional

Dr. Piera Gravenor
Delsea Regional

Arthur Dietz
Deptford Public Schools

Dr. Shannon Whalen
Gateway Regional

Mike Dicken
GCIT

Dr. Mark Silverstein
Glassboro Public Schools

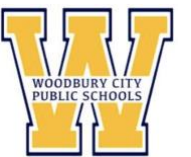
Dr. James Lavender
Kingsway Regional

Tom Coleman
Monroe Twp. Public Schools

Dr. Walt Quint
Paulsboro Public Schools

Dr. Patrick McAleer
Pitman Public Schools

Joseph N. Bollendorf
Washington Twp. Public Schools



Gregory Cappello, Esq.
West Deptford Public Schools

Andrew Bell
Woodbury Public Schools