Dear Members,

It’s hard to believe but it has been nearly a month since I have written to you with updates about the current challenges we are facing. Read on for recent updates...

**Richland County Elevates to Level 3**

No doubt at this point you have heard that yesterday the Governor announced that Richland County has joined 18 other counties in the State in being at the “Level 3” status. I know that this is a very hot button issue and there are opinions on all sides. My goal is just to give you some details about this, and let you know what additional mandates we have. As always, how you choose to respond to this is your decision.

The Governor introduced this 4-level alert system two weeks ago to increase the information available to Ohioans about COVID-19 risk at the County Level. Seven indicators are analyzed to assess risk for each county. The chart is updated once per week and announced on Thursday. The indicators are as follows:

1. New Cases Per Capita – Flagged if greater than 50 cases per 100,000 residents over the last two weeks.
2. Sustained Increase in New Cases – Flagged if increasing trend of at least 5 days in overall cases by onset date.
3. Proportion of Cases Not Congregate Cases – Flagged if proportion of cases that are not in a congregate setting goes over 50%.
4. Sustained Increase in Emergency Room Visits – Flagged if increasing trend of at least 5 days in the number of visits to the emergency department with COVID-like illness or a diagnosis.
5. Sustained Increase in Outpatient Visits - Flagged if increasing trend of at least 5 days in the number of people going to a health care provider with COVID symptoms who then receive a COVID confirmed or suspected diagnosis.
6. Sustained Increase in New COVID Hospital Admissions – Flagged if increasing trend of at least 5 days in the number of new hospitalizations due to COVID.
7. Intensive Care Unit (ICU) Bed Occupancy – Flagged if the percentage of occupied ICU beds in each region goes above 80% for at least three days in the last week.

As of this week, we have triggered 4 of the 7. From the State, here’s where we are at:

1. New Cases Per Capita - (67 cases between June 23 and July 13)
2. Proportion of Cases Not Congregate Cases - (76% of cases are not from a congregate setting)
3. Sustained increase in Emergency Room Visits - (from 3 visits per day to 6 visit per day from June 23 to July 13)
4. Sustained Increase in Outpatient Visits - (from 21 visits to 29 visits)

Here is a data sheet for our county that the State issued.

**What does this mean:** Moving to a Level 3 has triggered a mandatory mask order which begins this evening at 6:00pm and continues as long as we are designated Level 3. Here is the original order and especially read page 5, which spells out in great detail when we are to wear masks, and what exceptions there are to that (note that while this original order doesn’t mention Richland County, there is another one that updates it and denotes any county at Level 3 is subject to this order).

As I have since the start, when a new order comes down, I think about it from your point of view as a business owner. The goal from the State seems to be voluntary compliance with this, but if someone complains about non-compliance with this then the health department may be forced to follow up with your business. Here is a generic sign that the State has created that you can post to alert people entering your establishment.
**Federal Funding & Stimulus Update**

In case you did not hear, the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) was extended through August 8th. If your business has not taken advantage of this program, it’s not too late. I have written extensively in the past about how to apply and the rules. If you want a refresher, [check out this page](#) with our past emails. You can contact your lender to see if they are still participating. If you don’t have a lender, let me know and I would be happy to connect you.

The Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) announced that they have reached their limit on the Advance Grant…but that they still have money to lend for the traditional loan program. Here is where you go to apply (and note that I have written extensively on this as well).

So what might be coming in a 4th Round of Coronavirus stimulus funding? Well that is still being decided by the House, Senate and the President. [Click here to see](#) a good overview for what the US Chamber is advocating for on behalf of businesses. Topics being discussed include business liability safe harbor, state & local government funding, additional business stimulus, personal stimulus, the expanded unemployment assistance and more. We’re talking to our Congressional delegation about many of these items, but if you have particular concerns I always encourage people to reach out directly. Here are the links: [Senator Brown](#), [Senator Portman](#), [Congressman Gibbs](#), [Congressman Balderson](#).

**Changes Made to Ohio Minority & Women-Owned Microenterprise Grant**

Earlier today I was made aware of some changes that the State of Ohio has made to a previously announced grant for minority and/or women-owned small businesses. The grants are $10,000 each. Sole proprietors or those with multiple employees can apply but your revenues must be $500,000 or less. They have changed some of the guidelines to make it more broadly available, so even if you did not qualify before, you should check it out now. The application is pretty easy and it is on a first come, first served basis with a limited amount of grants available. [Click here to see the criteria and application form](#). Help us spread the word to business that you know would qualify!

**RCDG Small Business Loan Fund**

Don’t forget about our own RCDG Small Business Loan Fund. We’re lending collateral for your loan of up to $10,000 per business working through 3 local lenders. [Here’s a great fact sheet](#) to find out more, and you can always reach out to [Barrett Thomas](#), our Economic Development Director.

**Quick Hits**

- We’re working on our new website and [we need some photographs and videos](#) of area residents at work. If you are interested in helping us with this, we would greatly appreciate it. Send an [email to Angie Fanello](mailto:angiefanello@richlandchamber.com) and let her know you’d be happy to have a ‘photo shoot’ at your business.
- Interested in supporting the Richland County STRONG campaign? We are still selling t-shirts and yard signs! You can support the Chamber and our community at the same time! [Click here to check them out](#).
- Thanks to all for taking our [business survey](#) earlier this week, we had a great response rate! We’re working on pulling the data together and then I will send out an update on the results. Look for that early next week. If you missed it, you can [still take it here](#).
- Have you taken the [2020 Census](#) yet? Am I really still talking about that? YES! Why? Because it matters greatly. Future funding, congressional representation, economic development activity – our population count on the [2020 Census](#) impacts all of that. Do me a favor and [encourage your employees](#) to take it too. Here’s our updated response rates (I know we can keep climbing!): Richland County (67.7%), Mansfield (60.4%), Shelby (68.6%), Ontario (75.7%), Lexington (74.4%), Bellville (75.4%).
Final Thoughts
It feels like we are struggling to collectively agree on much these days. We probably all agree that 2020 is getting a big thumbs down. It’s been an unbelievable few months. I know as I write this, I will be talking to people on all sides of every debate currently happening in this country right now.

So what can we agree on? I suspect we can agree that we want to continue to make Richland County and all the cities, villages and townships better. We’ve all been working together so hard to do that for many years.

I’m a transplant here. I just celebrated my 6th anniversary as the Chamber President, moving here from my hometown of Rochester, NY. In 2014, I was excited to take this job and be near my college friends (proud AU grad, here!) and have a chance at playing a part in the comeback story of a region. But I didn’t fully expect what happened -- in the last 6 years I fell in love...with this community. Seriously. I love it. I pour my heart and soul into the work we are doing and I believe firmly in our future potential.

But this time is a test. How resilient will we be? Will we draw together or push apart? The answer will greatly impact our path forward together. We don’t all have to agree on everything (that is impossible). But let’s choose to agree to disagree with a spirit of kindness, let us bear together in these times of trial, let us show kindness to those who are more greatly impacted, let us support our local community all the more. Let us not give up going after big things and dreaming big. We can do this.

When I think about this topic, this lyric (from a really terrible song from the 90's when I was in college) keeps getting stuck in my head, forgive my slight liberty to adapt it:

\[
\text{We get knocked down, but we get up again} \\
\text{You are never gonna keep us down}
\]

The future is in our hands. What are we going to do with it?

I choose to believe in the bright future of Richland County, Mansfield, Shelby, Ontario, Lexington, Bellville, Butler, Plymouth, Shiloh, Lucas, Madison. Together we are #RichlandCountySTRONG

Onward!
Jodie

Jodie A. Perry, CCE, IOM, CCEO-AP
President & CEO
Richland Area Chamber & Economic Development

PS – We have been widening our email list. If this is the first email you’ve received – Welcome! Here is a link to our past emails and other great resources to help your business!

PPS – I’m so sorry in advance for getting that song stuck in your head. 😊