



Durham CAN
(Congregations, Associations and Neighborhoods)
732 Ninth Street, #604, Durham, NC 27705
(919) 627-1769 www.DurhamCAN.org

June 30, 2020

Rodney Jenkins
Director, Durham County Department of Public Health

Dear Director Jenkins,

We, Durham Congregations, Associations, and Neighborhoods (Durham CAN), are an organization based in over 30 influential institutions throughout our community that share a concern for families and a tradition of faith and democracy. We seek to develop public relationships with elected, appointed, and other leaders in our community, and through those relationships shape public policy for the common good, especially for the voiceless and vulnerable in Durham. We also hold our leaders accountable. While we hope to have a relational meeting with you soon (see below), the current circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic do not permit us to wait before sharing with you our concerns and requests.

When you assumed the role of Director of Durham County Department of Public Health (DCoDPH), you committed to serving all the residents of Durham County. In this role, you are charged with helping the whole community, including those people who cannot speak for themselves. We are writing today specifically about our incarcerated brothers and sisters at the Durham County Detention Facility. We acknowledge and thank you for the Durham County Coronavirus Data Hub, which includes the total number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the county, the average age of a COVID-19 person, the demographics, and the total number of deaths. While the Data Hub is revealing, it lacks testing and results specific to the Durham County Detention Facility. The DCoDPH website mentions that it will use every resource at its disposal to help stop the spread of COVID-19. We believe that transparent and up-to-date testing and results specific to the Durham County Detention Facility is critical in combating the spread of COVID-19.

In a letter to Durham CAN dated June 1, 2020, Sheriff Clarence Birkhead stated that approximately 24 residents were tested for COVID-19, and thankfully, none were positive. When asked about making this data public, Sheriff Birkhead indicated that this information was forwarded to you, Director Jenkins. Thus, our first request of you today is:

Will you make current and future COVID-19 testing and results specific to the Durham County Detention Facility publicly available on the Durham County Department of Public Health's website?

As the Health Director, we know you understand the dire consequences of a virus making its way into a closed building with congregate residents like the Detention Facility. During an online conversation that we had with Sheriff Birkhead on June 8, he committed to testing all the

residents of the Detention Facility if he had sufficient resources. He told us that he did not have the resources then, and he anticipated that his budget would be reduced in the next county budget. If you have access to tests that could be made available to the residents at the Detention Facility, we would ask that you make these tests immediately available so that all residents can be tested. Even if you do not have access to a significant number of tests currently, Durham county will be receiving federal money from the CARES Act that must be used towards mitigating the effects of COVID-19. Thus, our second request of you today is:

Will you provide tests and/or advocate or arrange to designate a portion of the CARES Act money that Durham county receives to fund COVID-19 testing for all residents of the Durham County Detention Facility?

Finally, as we indicated above, Durham CAN believes that the most productive public relationships we can have with our leaders is borne of a strong relational foundation. Thus, our final request today is:

Will you meet with Durham CAN leaders via online platform in the next month to discuss your work and vision for DCoDPH?

We believe that answering yes to all three of our questions would be consistent with your commitment to protect and serve all of Durham County residents. Considering the aggressive nature of COVID-19, we hope that since June 1, 2020, there has been ample testing in the Durham County Detention Facility. We hope that tests are readily available for our incarcerated brothers and sisters. We acknowledge all the steps you have taken thus far, but we hope that our call for more transparency does not go unanswered as it is your duty to keep our community safe. As coronavirus cases rise in our county and state, our concerns are obviously urgent. We eagerly await a response to this letter. We look forward to speaking with you soon, and we hope you will let us know if there is anything Durham CAN can do to help you in your work.

Sincerely,
Durham Congregations, Associations, and Neighborhoods