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Gov. Wolf, Lt. Gov. Fetterman: New Task Force for Health Disparity to Address How COVID-19 Affects Minorities

Harrisburg, PA – Amid growing concern for how COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting minority populations in the state and adding to existing health disparity issues, today Gov. Tom Wolf and Lt. Gov. John Fetterman announced the creation of a COVID-19 Response Task Force for Health Disparity that will help communicate issues with how the pandemic is affecting the state's minority and vulnerable populations.

"We know of instances in Pennsylvania where major COVID-19 outbreaks have occurred in vulnerable communities, including ones where people do not speak English," Gov. Wolf said. "We're working to improve our data collection so we can get a better statistical understanding of how the virus has affected different groups of people. The Lieutenant Governor will be chairing a new Health Disparity Task Force that will work to identify short- and long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in our vulnerable communities."

The Task Force is comprised of members of the Wolf Administration, led by Lt. Gov. Fetterman and including the executive directors of each of the governor's five commissions representing minority populations, members of the Department of Health's Health Equity Response team and those that serve as the contact for stakeholders, constituents and legislators on issues and concerns surrounding health disparity in Pennsylvania's vulnerable communities during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

In addition to multiple information-gathering meetings each week, this working group will proactively reach out to leaders in these communities to collect feedback, ideas, and general comments on this issue.

The goal of the task force is to prepare recommendations to the governor that will address the short- and long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the state's minority and vulnerable communities.

“It’s unconscionable for Black, Hispanic, and Asian-Pacific Pennsylvanians to be hit harder by this pandemic, which has highlighted the systemwide inequity that already existed in these communities,” said Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman. “It’s our job to keep all Pennsylvanians safe, and we need to reach into these communities and create a line of communication straight to the governor, so we can stop the spread of COVID-19.”

The Department of Health releases daily data on those affected with COVID-19, but data on race has been in short supply.

“Currently we are missing that vital race information from approximately 70% of the data we are receiving from providers,” said Dr. Rachel Levine, Secretary of the Department of Health. “Yesterday we [issued a reminder](#) to hospitals and other providers that it is mandatory to report race data. We need to gather this information for a complete picture of how the virus is affecting black or African-American, Hispanic and other vulnerable communities. An increase in reporting race data means less anecdotal evidence and more facts to rely on for accurately tracking where and how we can best serve our minority populations.”

“By working proactively with leaders of different communities across our commonwealth, we can better ensure nobody gets left out as we start to recover from this crisis,” Gov. Wolf said. “We all need to continue to work together to get through this pandemic. We need to continue to care for one another. We need to continue to support each other. And we need to continue to be mindful of how our actions affect others.”