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President
Tamika Walker Kelly

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January 13, 2021

The Honorable Gov. Roy Cooper
Delivery via Email

Dear Governor Cooper:

As we all move headlong into the 10th month of this global pandemic, we would like to thank you for your steady leadership throughout this crisis. No one asked for any of this, and we recognize the difficult decisions you have had to make to balance the often-competing interests of everyone in our state.

However, in the past few weeks, educators in North Carolina have been increasingly concerned with the levels of COVID-19 infection throughout the state. As Sec. Cohen has herself said, we are in very dangerous territory, and the numbers continue to climb. We are again asking you make a difficult decision.

We have maintained from the start of this pandemic that we are eager to reopen schools when it can be done safely. The science and research around COVID safety has evolved significantly since last March, and it is clear that schools can be among the safest of places for both students and educators when proper masking, distancing, and sanitation protocols are in place, though this can only be the case when infections within the wider community are under control. As we all know, community infection rates are not under control.

As the [North Carolina Nurses Association made clear in their letter to you last week](#), our hospitals and medical staff are being overwhelmed. Despite clear guidance from your office, NC DHHS, and even the CDC, compliance with the masking and distancing protocols is not working well enough to prevent rampant viral spread throughout our communities. And as critical members of our local communities, North Carolina public schools are being negatively impacted. It does not matter how fastidiously educators enforce masking and distancing mandates in the classroom if infection rates are in excess of 10 percent outside the classroom.

Therefore, we request that you take immediate and significant executive action to again curb community spread of this virus until such time that infection rates are again under control. The ongoing vaccine distribution is a welcome development, but it will still be several months before a significant portion of our residents receive the immunization, and our schools simply cannot wait until that point. Your immediate action is necessary to save lives, and we implore you to do so.

Most Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tamika W. Kelly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tamika" and last name "Kelly" clearly legible.

Tamika Walker Kelly
President, North Carolina Association of Educators