

Testimony for Keisha Lance Bottoms
Mayor, City of Atlanta, GA

before the

U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on the Coronavirus

May 29, 2020

Good afternoon members of the House Select Committee on the Coronavirus. My name is Keisha Lance Bottoms, and I am the Mayor of Atlanta, Georgia, the cradle of the Civil Rights Movement and the anchor of the 10th largest local economy in the United States.

Thank you to Chairman Jim Clyburn, and to each of you, for inviting to testify at this important hearing. I am honored to join you.

I want to offer my sincere condolences to Representative Maxine Waters on the passing of her sister.

Our communities are sick and tired, and now dying.

That is why the City of Atlanta is in the process of a thoughtful and strategic reopening that is being driven by data, metrics, and the advice of leading medical experts, such as Dr. Carlos del Rio of the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University.

As we begin to reopen, we are focusing on the safety and health of our residents and businesses by following the recommendations of our Advisory Council for the Reopening of Atlanta. The Council consists of a group of 60 business, academic, medical, and faith-based leaders who met over a five-week period to provide us with a science-based road map for reopening Atlanta.

We also are listening to our residents. We recently conducted a resident survey which prompted more than 15,700 responses from Atlantans, who indicated in overwhelming fashion that they felt *unwilling* to go to most businesses and venue types.

Approximately 97% of respondents said they would not feel safe going to establishments after reopening without taking their own protective measures, such as wearing a face mask, hand washing, avoiding crowds, and wearing their own personal protective equipment.

A large majority of respondents also indicated they would be willing to wear a face mask if required to do so by a workplace or business establishment.

Atlanta is the most densely populated city in our state and is especially vulnerable to Coronavirus. We are home to many residents with underlying health concerns such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

We also have a large population of African Americans, who experience greater COVID-19 disparities than other populations. According to the CDC, African American people represent 27 percent of the cases in America, while making up 13 percent of the population. Latino people account for 28 percent of the cases, while comprising 18 percent of the overall population.

Additionally, a recent CDC report (*May 1*), showed that more than 80 percent of those hospitalized by COVID-19 in Georgia were African American. In Georgia and other states, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored racial, health and economic inequities that deserve an urgent and larger national conversation.

Atlanta also faces the challenge of being located in one of the first states to reopen non-essential businesses, even as COVID-19 hotspots continued to develop throughout Georgia. We are closely watching our numbers and monitoring the impact that our state's reopening has on positive cases in Georgia.

Although many people are making efforts to protect themselves when they venture out from their homes, there are still far too many individuals who are not wearing face masks and practicing social distancing. This continues to be a challenge and concern for our communities because we are not out of the woods with this pandemic.

However, we are encouraged by the progress we are making, some of which we can credit to the preparation that began in February as we became aware of the Coronavirus outbreak.

We took early emergency action through a series of Administrative and Executive Orders to provide relief to our most vulnerable communities.

We quickly allocated \$7 million dollars from our reserve fund to expand and accelerate food programs for children and seniors, provide assistance to small businesses, stand up shelters for individuals experiencing homelessness, and to help residents in need of housing assistance.

In rapid succession, we suspended the termination of water services for nonpayment. We were one of the first cities to institute hazard pay for essential workers. We placed a moratorium on evictions at housing properties subsidized by government agencies. We eased restrictions on restaurants to allow the sale of unopened wine and beer by the package for off-premises consumption. We suspended towing and the booting of vehicles in the city right-of-way to ease parking for takeout delivery workers.

To provide further relief for Atlantans, we launched a website-based initiative, ATLSTRONG, to raise donations for populations in need, including funds to support small businesses and our creative community.

Our Strength in Beauty Fund supports Atlanta-based hair salons, barber shops and other businesses in the cosmetology industry. Our Cre-A-T-L Fund supports Atlanta's creative arts community. We also support funding to residents in the form of emergency rental assistance.

The #ATLSTRONG website links to Johns Hopkins' COVID-19 dashboard which allows our residents to see the information that is informing our decisions on pandemic operations and when it is safe to move to another level of reopening.

The City has supported testing sites operated by the State of Georgia and its partners and we have helped to ensure that testing is accessible to neighborhoods that are potential hotspots.

The City of Atlanta will continue to advocate for all of our residents, and we will continue to provide support to our residents who struggle financially.

But cities can only do so much. As a result of this pandemic, we are facing a revenue shortfall of \$35 to \$40 million in this year's budget. So far, we have not missed a beat as we maintain public-safety operations and other essential functions. But we are squeezing every dime.

Enhanced Congressional support is necessary going forward, and we need to ensure that relief funds reach the communities and people who need them most.

According to recent polls, more than two-thirds of the American people support the House-passed HEROES Act, and we urge the passage of this stimulus bill that benefits all Americans in a more equitable fashion.

We are grateful for the \$88.4 million dollars the City of Atlanta received under the CARES Act, which will help bring further relief to Atlanta residents and businesses over the coming months. We are thankful, as well, for the \$338 million received by Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, which is consistently ranked the world's busiest and most efficient airport.

These are unprecedented times and we feel a bold investment in our working families is required.

Atlanta is a city of 500,000 residents and the economic engine of a metro area of six million people. We also lead the nation in income inequality. The average income for the top five percent of households exceeds \$663,000, while families in the bottom half earn less than \$65,000 – a ratio of more than 10 to one (1).

We need additional federal support to bolster small businesses and the many people who are working paycheck to paycheck at jobs that are endangered, or have been put on hold, by this pandemic.

Like all other cities, the road to recovery from COVID-19 has to run through Atlanta. It should not matter if a city is located in a Blue State or a Red State. We are all in a state of emergency when it comes to COVID-19, and we welcome the relief your help will provide to the people who call Atlanta home.

We also encourage you to support smaller cities under 500,000 in population that are fighting COVID-19 on the front lines for their communities.

Thank you.

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