June 2, 2020

Governor Roy Cooper
Office of the Governor
20301 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-0301

**Re: Recommendations to Support Local Governments during the Pandemic**

Dear Governor Cooper,

We are writing on behalf of the Orange County Climate Council, a collaborative effort established by Orange County, Carrboro, Chapel Hill, and Hillsborough. Our mission is to develop equitable, effective solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect County residents from climate impacts. Council members include representatives from the county and municipal governments, the school systems, UNC-Chapel Hill, community organizations, and Orange County residents.

Like other communities across our state, we continue to face the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We thank you for your leadership during this challenging time and for your efforts to help local governments address immediate budget shortages. We urge you and your administration to continue these efforts. State and federal support is critical at this time to ensure that county and municipal governments can continue protecting public health and safety, educating our citizens, providing transportation services, and performing other essential functions.

**We also urge your administration to identify opportunities to ensure that COVID relief efforts help our local communities and economies emerge stronger, healthier, and more resilient.** As North Carolina's communities deal with the public health and economic impacts of COVID-19, many are still rebuilding after recent hurricanes and preparing for the likelihood of another active hurricane season. Furthermore, the economic impacts of the pandemic are likely to have long-term effects in many parts of our state. These challenges are interrelated and require a comprehensive response, as noted in the World Health Organization's "Prescriptions for a Healthy and Green Recovery from COVID-19." (See Appendix.)

Identifying opportunities for government funding to deliver multiple public health and economic benefits is particularly important during this time of shrinking budgets. COVID-19 recovery funding will be most impactful if it addresses local governments' immediate budgetary needs, protects local jobs, reduces ongoing expenses for governments or citizens, and improves the quality of life in our communities. Numerous local projects can achieve these goals. For example, reducing energy consumption in schools and government buildings, expanding telecommuting options, or enhancing infrastructure to mitigate flooding would target near-term

needs while providing long-term savings and public health benefits. In addition, state support could help local governments continue beneficial practices that were initially implemented as temporary responses to the pandemic.

Economic, public health, and resiliency needs differ across the state. We encourage you to work with local governments and community stakeholders to identify priorities and determine how pandemic relief efforts can deliver multiple benefits for North Carolina.

Sincerely,

Mark Marcopolis, Chair, Orange County Climate Council

Melissa McCullough, Vice Chair, Orange County Climate Council

**Endorsements:**

**APPENDIX**

# Prescriptions for a healthy and green recovery from COVID-19 (excerpted from "WHO Manifesto for a Healthy Recovery from COVID-19")

26 May 2020

https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/who-manifesto-for-a-healthy-recovery-from-covid-19.

## 1) Protect and preserve the source of human health: Nature.

Economies are a product of healthy human societies, which in turn rely on the natural environment - the original source of all clean air, water, and food. Human pressures, from deforestation, to intensive and polluting agricultural practices, to unsafe management and consumption of wildlife, undermine these services. They also increase the risk of emerging infectious diseases in humans – over 60% of which originate from animals, mainly from wildlife. Overall plans for post-COVID-19 recovery, and specifically plans to reduce the risk of future epidemics, need to go further upstream than early detection and control of disease outbreaks. They also need to lessen our impact on the environment, so as to reduce the risk at source.

## 2) Invest in essential services, from water and sanitation to clean energy in healthcare facilities.

Around the world, billions of people lack access to the most basic services that are required to protect their health, whether from COVID-19, or any other risk. Handwashing facilities are essential for the prevention of infectious disease transmission, but are lacking in 40 % of households. Antimicrobial-resistant pathogens are widespread in water and waste and their sound management is needed to prevent the spread back to humans. In particular it is essential that health care facilities be equipped with water and sanitation services, including the soap and water that constitutes the most basic intervention to cut transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and other infections, access to reliable energy that is necessary to safely carry out most medical procedures, and occupational protection for health workers.

Overall, avoidable environmental and occupational risks cause about one quarter of all deaths in the world. Investment in healthier environments for health protection, environmental regulation, and ensuring that health systems are climate resilient, is both an essential guardrail against future disaster, and offers some of the best returns for society. For example, every dollar that was invested in strengthening the US Clean Air Act has paid back 30 dollars in benefit to US citizens, through improved air quality and better health.

## 3) Ensure a quick healthy energy transition.

Currently, over seven million people a year die from exposure to air pollution – 1 in 8 of all deaths. Over 90% of people breathe outdoor air with pollution levels exceeding WHO air quality guideline values. Two-thirds of this exposure to outdoor pollution results from the burning of the same fossil fuels that are driving climate change .

At the same time, renewable energy sources and storage continue to drop in price, increase in reliability, and provide more numerous, safer and higher paid jobs. Energy infrastructure decisions taken now will be locked in for decades to come. Factoring in the full economic and social consequences, and taking decisions in the public health interest, will tend to favour renewable energy sources, leading to cleaner environments and healthier people.

Several of the countries that were earliest and hardest hit by COVID-19, such as Italy and Spain, and those that were most successful in controlling the disease, such as South Korea and New Zealand, have put green development alongside health at the heart of their COVID-19 recovery strategies. A rapid global transition to clean energy would not only meet the Paris climate agreement goal of keeping warming below 2C, but would also improve air quality to such an extent that the resulting health gains would repay the cost of the investment twice over.

## 4) Promote healthy, sustainable food systems.

Diseases caused by either lack of access to food, or consumption of unhealthy, high calorie diets, are now the single largest cause of global ill health. They also increase vulnerability to other risks - conditions such as obesity and diabetes are among the largest risk factors for illness and death from COVID-19.

Agriculture, particularly clearing of land to rear livestock, contributes about ¼ of global greenhouse gas emissions, and land use change is the single biggest environmental driver of new disease outbreaks. There is a need for a rapid transition to healthy, nutritious and sustainable diets. If the world were able to meet WHO's dietary guidelines, this would save millions of lives, reduce disease risks, and bring major reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions.

## 5) Build healthy, liveable cities.

Over half of the world's population now lives in cities, and they are responsible for over 60% of both economic activity and greenhouse gas emissions. As cities have relatively high population densities and are traffic-saturated, many trips can be taken more efficiently by public transport, walking and cycling, than by private cars. This also brings major health benefits through reducing air pollution, road traffic injuries – and the over three million annual deaths from physical inactivity.

Many of the largest and most dynamic cities in the world, such as Milan, Paris, and London, have reacted to the COVID-19 crisis by pedestrianizing streets and massively expanding cycle lanes - enabling "physically distant" transport during the crisis, and enhancing economic activity and quality of life afterwards.

## 6) Stop using taxpayers' money to fund pollution.

The economic damage from COVID-19 and the necessary control measures, is very real, and will place huge pressure on Government finances. Financial reform will be unavoidable in recovering from COVID-19, and a good place to start is with fossil fuel subsidies.

Globally, about US$400 billion every year of taxpayers' money is spent directly subsidizing the fossil fuels that are driving climate change and causing air pollution. Furthermore, private and social costs generated by health and other impacts from such pollution are generally not built into the price of fuels and energy. Including the damage to health and the environment that they cause, brings the real value of the subsidy to over US$5 trillion per year- more than all governments around the world spend on healthcare – and about 2,000 times the budget of WHO.

Placing a price on polluting fuels in line with the damage they cause would approximately halve outdoor air pollution deaths, cut greenhouse gas emissions by over a quarter, and raise about 4% of global GDP in revenue. We should stop paying the pollution bill, both through our pockets and our lungs.