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September 1, 2020

The Honorable Gretchen Whitmer
Governor, State of Michigan
PO Box 30013
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Governor Whitmer;

We are writing to respectfully but urgently request you immediately marshal the resources of state government to compile and publicly release, on a consistent ongoing basis, vital public information regarding school related COVID outbreaks.

Right now across this great state, parents, educators and students are wrestling with whether to proceed with virtual or in-school learning in the face of the pandemic. For many families, this is among the most difficult decisions in this extraordinarily difficult year.

Yet, to date, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and local health departments have failed to provide the public with essential details on the exact location and severity of school related COVID outbreaks. On the verge of the new school year, MDHHS announced:

- The existence of 14 school related COVID outbreaks statewide well over a week ago. Since then we've learned of several more via social media and local word of mouth.
- Shortcomings in the state's COVID tracking systems, including the system's current inability to track exactly where these school-related outbreaks occur.
- A pledge to eventually release school-related COVID outbreak details once the tracking system is fixed and county health departments begin submitting to the state more details, including exact locations of COVID-impacted schools. MDHHS has indicated these fixes could take weeks.

In the meantime, county health departments, the first level of COVID reporting and tracking, continue to refuse media requests to release essential school-related outbreak details such as names and locations of impacted schools and number of known COVID cases. County health departments have cited confusion, lack of direction from state government, and a desire to protect schools from COVID-related stigma.

Respectfully, school related COVID outbreak information belongs to the taxpayers who pay for it, especially parents with school aged children. It is the duty of state and local health departments to protect public health. This includes the duty to inform the public of health risks transparently, rapidly, and fully – including the existence of COVID outbreaks in schools at the beginning of this very challenging school year.

Media organizations are filing Freedom of Information Act requests, but this is no time for drawn-out transparency battles.

We call on you to immediately provide Michigan families, students, educators, and taxpayers with the transparency they deserve. State government has more than 14,000 employees devoted to health and human

services. Beyond the weeks-long fix of state computer tracking systems, we call on you to marshal state government resources to immediately, fully, consistently, and continually release school-related COVID outbreak details – including the names of impacted schools, their locations, and number of cases – to the full Michigan public.

In closing, we respectfully remind you that, at the beginning of the pandemic, you declared professional news-gathering organizations an essential public service. We can think of few media public services more essential and urgent in this moment than informing local communities on COVID outbreaks in schools.

Sincerely,

The Michigan School-Related COVID Outbreak Transparency Coalition

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