



Representative Emilia Strong Sykes
Ohio House District 34
Minority Leader

May 13, 2020

Speaker Larry Householder
Ohio House of Representatives
77 S. High Street, 14th Floor
Columbus OH 43215

Speaker Householder,

I write today to express disappointment with the memorandum your office issued this morning detailing your unilateral decision to loosen safety protocols during House session. This decision was made without consultation from our caucus leadership team and stands in stark contrast to safe return to work practices recommended by healthcare professionals.

Returning most members to the House Chamber defies recommendations on mass gatherings, and with the majority of Republican members entering the Chamber without face coverings, disregards basic safe reopening guidelines from health officials and our own Republican governor. Democrats support coming back to work to pass meaningful legislation to benefit everyday Ohioans affected by COVID-19, but returning without commonsense safety measures in place threatens the health and safety of all of us—members, staff, media, and law enforcement.

But we know this issue isn't confined to the Ohio House of Representatives. In communities across Ohio, in all 99 House districts, Ohio businesses are reopening and workers are justifiably worried if their workplace is safe enough. Many of these Ohioans are low-wage workers living paycheck to paycheck, in a position where getting sick and missing work means having to make some tough financial choices for them and their families.

As elected officials in the People's House, it is our obligation to lead by example. In this instance, Mr. Speaker, the example set by your office discounts the health, safety and input of working people and their families, and threatens to undue the incredible sacrifices we made to flatten the curve and save countless lives in our state.

Wearing a mask, whether on the House floor or at a local shop or restaurant, is a best practice. Limiting large gatherings is a best practice. These best health practices not only protect ourselves, but more importantly protect others. We owe it to everyday Ohioans to take this virus seriously by listening to the science, adhering to best health practices and putting people first. Refusing to do so is irresponsible, dangerous and beneath our moral obligation as elected representatives.



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We can work together on the important issues facing Ohio families during this time of historic and unprecedented crisis. And we can do it safely. As the governor says, Ohioans can do two things at once. It is our obligation to model that behavior, and in doing so, let working people and families feeling apprehensive about going back to work know that we are all in this together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emilia Strong Sykes".

Emilia Strong Sykes
Minority Leader
Ohio House District 34

