



GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL RIGHTS
EXECUTIVE

MARY ENGELMAN
INTERIM DIRECTOR

April 24, 2020

Dear ALPACT Partners:

Earlier today Governor Whitmer issued an Executive Order providing for an easing of some of the Stay Home, Stay Safe restrictions while also requiring that those who are in public must wear masks.

This mandatory mask requirement raises unique concerns for some Michiganders. Of particular significance for law enforcement to consider when interacting with the public:

- **We must be conscious to prevent ourselves from reacting differently to someone wearing a mask based upon their skin color, ethnicity, accent, or other characteristics not relevant to our assessment of safety concerns.** We must always check our own unconscious biases in every interaction with the public. Our brains are programmed to be suspicious of someone wearing a mask. Once everyone is doing so and we become accustomed to seeing them, that initial suspicion will largely go away. However, because we all have unconscious biases, it is likely that this change will happen gradually and vary depending on other factors.
- **When wearing a mask is required, it can never be perceived as being suspicious on its own.** We must recognize that many people of color are uncomfortable wearing masks because of how others react when they do. This can affect how a person responds to us if they feel we are treating them differently than we would others. It can also cause law enforcement to be inappropriately called to “suspicious” situations.
- **We need to be prepared to communicate in writing when necessary, or to step back to maintain proper distance and lower our own masks when that is necessary for communication purposes.** We must recognize that many people who are Deaf and hard of hearing rely on lip reading to communicate. It is important to watch for indicators that someone is having difficulty communicating because they, or we, are wearing a mask. Someone who cannot speak may lower their mask to mouth their need to communicate in writing, or they may reach for a pad and pencil. These actions need to be anticipated and are not an indication of any lack of cooperation.
- **Our perceptions of others must always be based on the individual behind the mask, not the mask itself.** We must recognize that not everyone has access to, can afford, or wishes to use, a commercial mask designed for these purposes. Whether someone is

wearing a purchased mask, a homemade one, or is simply using a scarf or bandana, they must be treated with the same respect and dignity. This also applies to personal choice of material, style and content of the mask itself.

- **The Elliott Larsen Civil Rights Act and the Persons With Disabilities Civil Rights Act prohibit treating members of the public differently based upon religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex or disability.** None of the Executive Orders or other special considerations required by this crisis in any way relaxes the requirements of state or federal civil rights laws.

Michigan's law enforcement officers are facing unique challenges during this unprecedented public health crisis. We are immensely proud of your extraordinary commitment to duty and to helping others at this difficult time in our history. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary L. Engelman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "M".

Mary Engelman, Interim Director
Michigan Department of Civil Rights