



STEUBEN COUNTY
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JACK K. WHEELER, MPA
COUNTY MANAGER

CHRISTOPHER M. BREWER
DEPUTY COUNTY MANAGER

December 3, 2020

Hon. John Marren
Chairman of the Board / NYSAC President
Ontario County Municipal Building
20 Ontario Street
Canandaigua, NY 14424

Dear Jack,

I wanted to take a moment to send along a sincere thanks and recognition of NYSAC staff, specifically Executive Director Steve Acquario. The talent and dedication of NYSAC staff is always on display, but they have all provided guidance and support above the call of duty during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I wanted to point out just a few examples that demonstrate the remarkable service of Steve and his team. In early April, Steuben County experienced a massive outbreak of the virus in three nursing homes simultaneously. We pressed NYSDOH to help support us in universal testing of staff and residents in these facilities, with them placing the caveat that we had to provide the testing supplies. At the time, our county had less than 100 PCR swabs on hand and required at least 500 to complete those urgent tests. I phoned Steve for advice, and without me asking, he immediately hit the road to the Hudson Valley, back to Albany, and over to Syracuse to borrow swabs from other counties, along with some PPE for the testing events. He met one of our Sheriff's Deputies in Syracuse to hand off the supplies, and as a result, we were able to begin testing at the nursing homes the following day. Without his selflessness and creativity, I am sure we would have been delayed by a number of days, putting additional nursing home residents at jeopardy. I honestly believe his actions helped save lives of a vulnerable population in our county. I know Steve well enough to say that these actions directly reflect his character and values, but I still find them extraordinary and worthy of great praise.

For another example – during these same nursing home outbreaks in April, myself and our Public Health Director Darlene Smith had very contentious interactions with NYSDOH regarding their policy which allowed positive asymptomatic staff to continue to work in nursing homes, instead of requiring mandatory isolation. We felt the risk of exposure was too great to these defenseless residents, and urged NYSDOH to reverse course, which continued to fall on deaf ears. I relayed these experiences with Steve and Mark LaVigne, who were both as frustrated as we were. To escalate the issue, these gentlemen put



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us in touch with statewide media who interviewed us, and directly asked the question to the Governor and Dr. Zucker during a daily press briefing on April 29th. By that evening, NYSDOH released guidance reversing this policy and requiring mandatory isolation for any positive nursing home employee. I view this as a significant victory, which wouldn't have been possible without the hard work of Steve and Mark, and I again firmly believe that this has saved lives across the state.

As our NYSAC President, I wanted to share these experiences with you and express my enduring gratitude for Steve, Mark, and all of NYSAC. For Steuben, we would not be able to navigate these trying times without the direct support of these individuals.

Thank you as well for your leadership and service, as you've a critical asset for our counties during the pandemic and beyond. Be well and I hope you and your family have the happiest of holidays.

Sincerely,

Jack K. Wheeler, MPA
County Manager