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March 9, 2020

The Honorable Senfronia Thompson
Chair, Committee on Public Health
Texas House of Representatives
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768

Dear Representative Thompson:

It was a complete surprise when on February 7, 2020, travelers from Wuhan, China arrived at Lackland Air Force Base to be quarantined for possible coronavirus infection for 14 days. And then later, passengers from the Diamond Princess Cruise ship were quarantined at Lackland, bringing the total in quarantine locally to 236.

Our local health professionals reacted by offering any assistance that was necessary. While San Antonio Mayor Nirenberg and I were supportive of assisting the evacuees, we also had a greater responsibility to protect our citizens from any transmission of the disease. We believed that those in quarantine should not be transferred off base to hospitals until test results could be confirmed. We also believed that any patient who tested positive should remain on base.

On February 18, 2020, I issued a letter to representatives of the federal government expressing my concerns and then on February 24, 2020, I joined Mayor Nirenberg in issuing a joint letter expressing these same concerns. We asked that no individual testing positive, while at Lackland Air Force Base, be transported into the Bexar County community. These concerns were ignored.

After that, a patient was released who had tested positive, then had two negative tests, and then another positive test. She was released before the last positive test came in. She stayed at a local hotel and then visited North Star Mall for two hours. After discovering the mistake, the person was then returned to quarantine at the Texas Center for Infectious Diseases (TCID).

Frustrated by federal government officials, Mayor Nirenberg and I declared a Public Health Emergency on March 2, 2020, to preserve and protect the public health of the residents San Antonio and Bexar County. The declaration stated that no quarantined person shall be permitted travel in the city and county.

As a result of this declaration, as well as pressure from other community leaders and health experts, the CDC changed their protocol for releasing those in quarantine at Lackland Air Force Base. Those that

Page Two
Re: COVID-19
March 9, 2020

met the criteria for release where transferred on special bus and taken directly to the airport where they were met with an airport official who escorted them to their plane.

Our Bexar County Office of Emergency Management (BCEOM) continues to monitor the existing situation with those who are quarantined. To date there are ten individuals who have tested positive at the TCID facility.

While there has not been any evidence of person-to-person transfer of COVID-19 in Bexar County, our Bexar County Emergency Management team continues to update our action plan. We keep in close contact with the 63 nursing homes located in the unincorporated areas of Bexar County because their patients are the most vulnerable. We encourage them to closely monitor their patients and tell them to wash their hands and avoid close contact with sick patients.

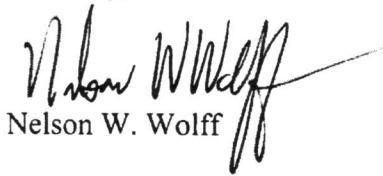
We participate every day in a virtual emergency operation center that includes representatives from the San Antonio Metropolitan Health District and the Southwest Texas Regional Advisory Council (STRAC), who coordinates over 70 hospitals in 27 Texas counties surrounding Bexar County. They have identified beds for Coronavirus patients.

Bexar County, the City of San Antonio and the San Antonio Metropolitan Health District have set up a joint information center to coordinate messages to the public. The message to our community is that the virus is spread person-to-person by droplets within about six feet. We encourage them to avoid close encounters, stay home if they are sick, and to clean and disinfect surfaces. I have written notices to all Bexar employees incorporating the above messages.

If the disease is passed to other people, the Texas Center for Infectious Disease will be critical in providing for quarantined patients. We encourage the State to make as many beds as possible available. Others will have to be quarantined at home and kept under close surveillance. Our hospitals are prepared to handle confirmed cases. The recent federal appropriations will be very helpful in assisting all our efforts.

Over the weekend, we received notice that we will be receiving evacuees from the Grand Princess Cruise ship. We were told that they do not exhibit symptoms. We believe that the CDC has adopted the correct protocols to protect the general public by keeping them on base and those that may be tested positive would be sent to the Texas Center for Infectious Disease. We are hopeful that the proper coordination and cooperation from our federal partners will mitigate the risk of these recent arrivals from negatively impacting our efforts to protect our community.

Sincerely,



Nelson W. Wolff

cc: Members of Committee on Public Health