



The General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
CAPE COD & ISLANDS LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION
State House, Boston 02133



Senator Julian Cyr · Representative Dylan Fernandes



March 21, 2020

The Honorable Charles D. Baker
Governor of the Commonwealth
State House, Room 360
Boston, MA 02133

MaryLou Sudders, Secretary
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
1 Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108

Dear Governor Baker and Secretary Sudders,

As community spread continues in the Commonwealth, we are particularly concerned for the two most isolated communities in Massachusetts: Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket.

Martha's Vineyard Hospital and Nantucket Cottage Hospital have both reported to us that they are not equipped to handle widespread community contagion. Each hospital has very limited beds, fewer ventilators, and only several days supply of PPE; healthcare personnel is inherently limited, given their geographic isolation. Contributing to the challenges facing island hospitals are the large number of individuals of all ages who have traveled to each island to "ride out the virus." We have discussed this phenomenon with leaders on both Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard; they estimate that the influx may have doubled the size of the normal off-season population on the respective islands. Our understanding is most people who have come to the islands are those who own a summer home, and hopefully are practicing social distancing. However, the isolation of both islands, the limited healthcare resources, and the influx of population obviously make Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket an urgent and potentially dire concern.

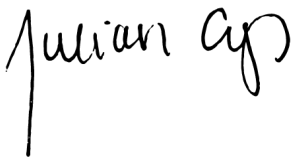
Martha's Vineyard Hospital CEO, Denise Schepici, Nantucket Cottage Hospital CEO, Gary Shaw, and MGH President, Peter Slavin, all expect a significant crisis on the islands in the coming days and weeks. We already know that the first confirmed COVID-19 patient in Dukes County interacted with dozens of people at multiple locations across Martha's Vineyard in the past week before their diagnosis.

Given this situation, we'd like to highlight the enclosed message that MGH/Partners sent to the Command Center on 3/19, and further request the following:

1. The Administration and Command Center should direct the Steamship Authority, Hyline, Cape Air, Rectrix, and the relevant airport and ferry leaders to widely distribute uniform information to their passengers strongly discouraging discretionary travel to the islands, including on all websites and ticketing locations. All travelers to the island must know that healthcare resources are extremely limited and that they may not be able to receive hospital-level care on-island if they need it. Note: We do know that some public safety personnel and other essential employees with important roles on the islands live on Cape Cod or elsewhere off-island, thus we believe some level of ferry transportation needs to continue throughout the pandemic.
2. We urge public health officials to issue best practices and guidelines for ferry travel for both passengers and ferry employees. All carriers should have consistent guidance to keep employees and passengers safe.
3. We urge the Administration and Command Center, in consultation with experts in epidemiology, to explore whether a ban of all non-essential travel to the islands is in the best public health interest for island residents, given their limited access to healthcare resources and their geographic isolation. Note: many islanders have been requesting this ban on non-essential travel for days.
4. With the mobilization of the National Guard, we strongly request your consideration of deployment of personnel to each island. The CEO's of both hospitals are worried about the safety of their staff and the need for additional assistance with triage in the event of a surge in hospitalizations. Both Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket have limited police and public safety resources, particularly during the off-season. If moderate or worse projections come to pass on either island, an unmanageable surge will occur.

It is a trying time and we are sailing in uncharted waters as a Commonwealth. We must plan for the worst and hope for the best. Thank you for your consideration. We are deeply grateful for your unwavering efforts to mitigate this pandemic. We look forward to your response and are ready to assist in protecting our shared island constituents.

Respectfully,



Julian Cyr
State Senator
Cape and Islands District



Dylan Fernandes
State Representative
Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket District