

July 23, 2020

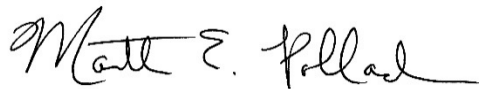
Assemblyperson Barbara Lifton
Member of the Assembly, 125th District
106 E. Court St.
Ithaca, NY 14850

Sent via Email

Dear Assemblyperson Lifton,

Thank you for your letter and for providing us with the opportunity to address your constituents' questions on Cornell's plans for reopening. We welcome the engagement of the Ithaca-area community in planning for the months ahead and are pleased to be able to provide additional clarity on the subjects of interest to your constituents. In addition to responding to your specific questions below, we are attaching Cornell's submission to the New York State Department of Health as required under guidance for higher education.

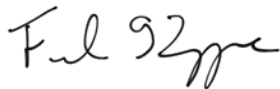
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Martha E. Pollack". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Martha" being more prominent.

Martha E. Pollack
President, Cornell University

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Leslyn McBean-Clairborne". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Chair
Tompkins County Legislature

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Frank Kruppa". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first name "Frank" being more prominent.

Frank Kruppa, Public Health Director
Tompkins County Health Department

- 1. How does Cornell explain the assumption that 9,000 students would return to/remain in Ithaca no matter what -- even if the University were to ask parents and students for them to stay away, for their own safety, as well as that of the larger community?**

Cornell's reactivation planning committees administered surveys and focus groups to garner input directly from faculty and students on their plans, preferences and perceptions related to reactivating Cornell's campus. A survey of students received 10,000 responses which revealed that if all fall courses were taught remotely, 31% of undergraduates indicated that they would be "very likely" and 22% would be "somewhat likely" to return to Ithaca for the semester. Graduate students also reported their intention to return to campus with 75% reporting that they would be "somewhat" or "very likely" to return to campus whether residential instruction is offered or if all classes are taught remotely.

On Thursday, July 16, Cornell sent students their "Re-entry Checklist," which is required to be completed before students may enroll in classes. Among the items on the Checklist is a requirement for students to share their intention to return to Ithaca and report where they will be living. Early responses to this Checklist confirmed results from our surveys: At this writing, nearly 11,000 students have completed the Checklist and just over 700(roughly 6%) have reported they intend to live away from Ithaca.

- 2. If the University were to pursue all-online teaching and students chose to return to Ithaca, why does Cornell assume it wouldn't be feasible to identify where they are living while taking courses online -- whether in Ithaca or at home? If students are in Ithaca, couldn't Cornell require them to participate in surveillance testing by simply restricting their access to instruction?**

If classes were all online this fall, Cornell would be limited in its ability to monitor the health status of or impose behavioral constraints on students who chose to return to Ithaca, presenting a significant risk to the community. By having students be part of the reopened university and residential campus, we have tools (e.g., limiting access to buildings and/or campus services) to make sure that the students coming back comply with our rules and make sure they are tested.

- 3. Is Cornell making all-online instruction available to any student who wants it? If not, what conditions is Cornell placing on the availability of all-online instruction? Has Cornell surveyed students to see how many prefer all-online instruction?**

Yes, online instruction will be available to any student. Cornell will offer two primary teaching modalities this fall: all online; and in-person, with remote accessibility into the classroom for students who are off-campus (national or international) or in quarantine. Faculty also will have the option of embracing a hybrid approach where some elements of a course are delivered online and others in-person, or where student cohorts take turns participating remotely versus in-person. Students will be provided with information in advance about the modality of each class and can use that information in selecting their courses.

Student survey results (from 10,365 respondents) reveal that 32% (n=2,560) of undergraduates would be "very likely" to enroll if all classes are taught remotely and 23% (n=1,813) were "somewhat likely".

4. **What are the projected effects of a projected 1,200+ new COVID-19 cases in the Cornell community on the spread of the virus in the Ithaca and Tompkins County community, and on communities beyond the borders of Tompkins County where many people in the local workforce live? What is the projected number of additional cases, hospitalizations and deaths in the surrounding community and region due to Cornell reopening?**

Dr. Peter Frazier, who conducted modelling of Cornell's campus is currently working to model the transmission from Cornell faculty, staff and students to individuals in the greater Ithaca area not affiliated with Cornell. Dr. Frazier hypothesizes that, based on the numbers in our current model, the number of cases in Cornell faculty, staff and students resulting in infections of individuals not associated with Cornell will be quite small. This is due in large part to the testing program Cornell has established, which will quickly identify asymptomatic individuals, place them in isolation and allow the Tompkins County Health Department to conduct contact tracing to minimize the spread to others. Cornell will release Dr. Frazier's new model once it is complete.

5. **Wouldn't 1,200+ new COVID-19 cases alone overwhelm the Tompkins County Health Department? Might the resulting hospitalizations overwhelm the surge capacity of the hospital?**

As part of the State's requirements for re-opening, the Tompkins County Health Department (TCHD) submitted a list of 36 nurses and sanitarians who completed the NYS Contact Tracing training (Johns Hopkins method) and are certified to conduct these investigations if needed. TCHD is also coordinating with Cornell Health to have staff trained in the Johns Hopkins contact tracing method to assist with contact tracing if necessary.

Cornell, Cayuga Medical Center, and the Tompkins County Health Department have been in regular contact about the potential impact of Cornell's reopening on the ability of our local health delivery systems to provide medical care to our community. In particular, Cayuga Medical Center has shared its plan to manage a possible surge in COVID-19 cases. Our partners are confident that community medical needs can be met and have endorsed our plan.

6. **Is Cornell planning to invest additional resources into the Tompkins County Health Department -- for example, to support increased health care provider staffing -- to assist with the additional burden that would be placed on them due to Cornell's reopening?**

Representatives from Cayuga Health, the Tompkins County Health Department, Cornell leadership and municipal leadership have been meeting regularly to discuss how to meet increased demand for services with all available resources. Cornell Health is training its staff in the Johns Hopkins contact tracing method to assist with contact tracing if necessary.

7. **Cornell's decision to reopen for in-person instruction was, apparently, based on modeling that was generated before the recent spikes in COVID-19 cases in many other states. Has there been any effort to update that modeling given those spikes? Will Cornell revisit the decision in light of updated projections?**

Research and modeling of various scenarios is ongoing, and data on testing results are being reviewed daily. Decision making will continue to be science- and data-driven.

8. Under Cornell's plan, who would be doing the testing of students -- Cornell personnel, Tompkins County personnel, or Cayuga Medical Center personnel? Who will pay for that testing?

Cornell is paying for regular surveillance testing of its faculty, staff and students, which is being carried out in partnership with Cayuga Health System at sites on Cornell's campus. The initial arrival testing for students who have arrived in Ithaca has already begun and will continue each Tuesday and Thursday through the beginning of the semester on September 2. Regular surveillance testing will occur once the semester begins. More information is available on Cornell's [COVID-19 site](#).

9. Cornell has said it expects test results may take anywhere from 24 hours to a week, and that students are expected to isolate until they have results. Some national experts have said that results that take a week are almost useless, in terms of effective contact tracing. Isn't asking students to wait a whole week for results problematic? Do the projections about increased COVID-19 cases rest on the assumption of 100% compliance -- that students will isolate for a week and not go out and infect other people?

Results from Cornell's surveillance testing sites are anticipated to have a quick turnaround (typically within one day). Residential students newly arriving into Ithaca from other states will be sequestered until their test results are in.

All students who will be in the Ithaca area this fall will be required to abide by the [Cornell Behavioral Compact](#), which will require students to participate fully in the [testing program](#) and comply with quarantine and isolation policies. Cornell will impose consequences in the event a student does not comply with testing requirements.

10. How reliable are the testing methodologies Cornell intends to use (e.g. chances of false negatives and false positives)? Do the plans include pooled testing? How feasible and reliable are the intended testing methods?

Cornell and Cayuga Medical Center are using the most state-of-the-art testing technologies. Our surveillance testing (regular testing of asymptomatic individuals) program will make use of pooled PCR testing, which has been approved by the FDA for surveillance purposes. In the event a pool is positive, all individuals in the pool will receive individual confirmatory diagnostic testing by Cayuga Medical Center to minimize chances of false positives.

11. For countries that flattened the curve quickly, such as South Korea, rigorous contact tracing measures, including tracking apps, were used. Is Cornell's contact tracing going to include this type of measure, or will it be a continuation of the contact tracing approach being used in Tompkins County currently?

New York state requires that local public health departments conduct contact tracing. Tompkins County has had a robust contract tracing effort in place throughout this pandemic, and it has been a key tool in effectively slowing the spread of the disease. Cornell Health and the Tompkins County Health Department will be collaborating on contact tracing for students and Cornell Health is training its staff in the Johns Hopkins contact tracing method to assist TCHD contact tracing if necessary.

- 12. Once students have arrived, what would be done (by Cornell and by local government entities) to prevail upon/require students to wear masks in public or whenever they can't socially distance? What does the student behavioral contract say will be the consequences for those who violate the mask order, social distancing, or other violations?**

On Monday July 13, New York state officials issued emergency regulations on COVID requirements including face-coverings ([10 NYCRR Subpart 66-3](#)). *Business operators and building owners must deny entry and require or compel the removal of any person who fails to comply with face-covering requirements.* The wearing of face coverings has proven to be one of the most effective ways to stop the spread of COVID-19, and is in-line with local guidance on reopening from the Tompkins County Health Department.

All students living on campus and in the Ithaca community will be required to sign the [Cornell Behavioral Compact](#), which will be finalized and shared publicly next week, to attest that they will abide by critical, public health-driven behavioral expectations around the wearing of masks, physical distancing, daily health check-ins, hygiene/cleaning and social gatherings. Cornell is also implementing a variety of behavioral-science informed trainings and will be training student monitors to assist on campus with mask compliance as well.

- 13. In general, how would the student behavioral "compact" committing them to responsible behavior be enforced?**

The [Behavioral Compact](#), outlines required behaviors and consequences for non-compliance. The disciplinary consequences will be scaled to offenses, starting with an educational approach, but may include parental contact, restrictions on access to campus facilities, interim suspension, and/or removal from the university. Violations of the Compact will be enforced by a newly created Cornell Compact Compliance Team ("CCCT") that will expeditiously respond to violations. Decisions of the CCCT are not appealable. Severe, pervasive, and/or repeated violations (including failure to comply with the order of a university official regarding testing, isolation, quarantine, and/or contact tracing requirements) of the Compact will be referred by the CCCT to the Office of the Judicial Administrator for investigation and adjudication pursuant to the Cornell University Campus Code of Conduct

- 14. Some have expressed concern about student parties that are larger than the current guidelines permit gatherings of up to 50 people, as large gatherings are a very regular occurrence in every college town. Who would enforce the safety protocols with students in off-campus, college rental areas? As an example, who would be called upon to respond to a midnight party with 100**

students -- Cornell University Police or other Cornell staff, city or county law enforcement or other officials?

With students being required to submit their local off-campus addresses, Cornell will be able to respond to reports of non-compliant off-campus gatherings based upon who lives at the address. Consequences for hosts will be determined by the Cornell Compact Compliance Team. In addition, Cornell will create a mechanism for any members of the community to report behavior prohibited by the Cornell Behavioral Compact. TCHD Environmental Health, Cornell, and local law enforcement will continue to work closely to ensure a coordinated response. Our focus is on achieving compliance via education and resource-sharing, but other disciplinary consequences are fully incorporated into our systems for the fall.

15. If students are directed to isolate or quarantine, how would those orders be enforced?

If any individual in Tompkins County is confirmed to be positive for COVID-19, a TCHD nurse will call them, give instructions for isolation, and monitor that individual daily through calls and zoom video chats for a length of time determined by the Health Department based on current NYSDOH and CDC guidelines. TCHD can also issue a Health Order for Isolation or Mandatory Quarantine in the case that someone is not complying.

Through the contact investigation, any individuals who are identified as a close contact to a known positive case will be notified by a TCHD nurse, given instructions for quarantine, and monitored daily for compliance with the instructions and ensure that symptoms do not develop.

16. What are the potential mental health effects of enforcing restrictions on students? How would Cornell deal with those effects among large numbers of students who are back in the community?

Cornell Health will respond to the health needs – both physical and mental – of individual students. Cornell Health provides a [wide range of services](#) — including [medical care](#) and [counseling](#) — through video visits and other [telehealth visits](#). Resources and access services are available to [support](#) the well-being of students in Ithaca and elsewhere during the COVID-19 pandemic. Please refer to the [Student Health section](#) of Cornell's COVID-19 and reactivation website for additional information.

17. For students who are found to be COVID-19 positive -- either at the start of the semester or during the semester -- is Cornell's plan to quarantine these students in downtown Ithaca hotels? Why aren't hotels further out from the city center being considered? Why isn't Cornell setting up their own "infirmary space" on campus?

Space in residence halls and the Statler hotel is being reserved for isolation of infected individuals. Cornell is also contracting with hotels within an hour of Ithaca to have 1,200 rooms available at various times during the fall semester to support any additional quarantine needs. Cornell will provide food and, in coordination with TCHD, monitor the ongoing health needs of students.

18. What will the instructions be to quarantined students regarding behaviors they must do to protect those in the surrounding community? How will their behaviors be monitored and their compliance enforced?

Students who test positive will be given specific guidelines based on Tompkins County Health Department protocols. The Health Department will work with Cornell to ensure students have a suitable environment for a safe recovery.

The [Behavioral Compact](#), which is currently being finalized, will outline required behaviors and consequences for non-compliance. Disciplinary consequences will be scaled to offenses, starting with an educational approach, but may include parental contact and/or removal from the university.

19. Is it true that Cornell has requested an exception to the 14-day, in-state quarantine rule for those coming from high-COVID-19 states, so as to permit a quarantine to take place for out-of-state students BEFORE leaving their home states, rather than upon their arrival in Ithaca? If true, what is the rationale for this special treatment for Cornell students? Whether or not this exemption is granted, how would the 14-day quarantine for students from high COVID-19 states be monitored or assured?

Cornell is asking all students planning to return to Ithaca to take test prior to departing for Ithaca, if possible. Cornell is also requesting that students make every effort to quarantine in place for 14 days before their intended arrival in Ithaca. Students arriving from states subject to the mandatory 14-day quarantine under [New York state Governor Andrew Cuomo's executive order](#), will be required to quarantine upon entry into New York state and are being asked to arrive in New York by August 17. The Office of Student and Campus Life will oversee and manage this process. The [Behavioral Compact](#) will outline required behaviors, including compliance with the executive order, and consequences for non-compliance. Disciplinary consequences will be scaled to offenses, starting with an educational approach, but may include parental contact and/or removal from the university.

20. Apparently, Cornell needs state approval for its reopening plan. Where is Cornell in that process? Has the University received tentative state approval?

Cornell has filed and attested to its reactivation plan with the New York State Department of Health as required under Governor Cuomo's guidance for higher education.