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24 August 2020

Director Janel Heinrich
Public Health Madison Dane County (PHMDC)
210 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd, Rm 507
Madison, WI 53703
Via email to JHeinrich@publichealthmdc.com

Chancellor Rebecca Blank, UW-Madison
161 Bascom Hall
500 Lincoln Drive
Madison, WI 53706
Via email to chancellor@wisc.edu

Re: UW-Madison's Smart Restart Plan

Dear Director Heinrich and Chancellor Blank:

We, the undersigned elected officials and candidate, know you have been in ongoing communication regarding UW-Madison's Smart Restart Plan. Shockingly, the plan involves bringing tens of thousands of students and workers back to campus to begin in-person classes on September 2, despite the ongoing community spread of COVID-19 in Dane County. According to the plan, 45% of classes have an in-person component through Thanksgiving Break.

Students have been moving into the dorms since August 15, most of them with a roommate, filling up the dorms to 90% capacity. Testing will only be required of students living in the dorms, and only once every two weeks. We question if this minimal amount of testing will be feasible given the current diversion and shortage of testing supplies. UW is only offering quarantine/isolation space for dorm residents, who account for about 20% of the student population. We are deeply concerned about the impact this plan will have on UW-Madison students, workers, and the greater Madison and Dane County community.

We oppose UW-Madison's Smart Restart Plan and request the following changes:

- 1) All virtual learning with rare exceptions, if necessary;**
- 2) Limiting residence in dorms to those students who lack alternative safe housing options; and**

3) Public disclosure of the specific metrics of COVID-19 spread that, if reached, will result in canceling in-person instruction.

In response to increased infection rates following the end of the Safer at Home Order and move to phase 2 of the Forward Dane plan, Public Health Madison Dane County (PHMDC) wisely issued Emergency Order #8, which, among many other things, mandates face-coverings, limits in-person indoor gatherings to 10 people or fewer, and mandates physical distancing of 6 feet. Paragraph 4(f) requires, “to the greatest extent possible”, that businesses facilitate “remote work and other measures that limit the number of individuals present at an office, facility, or store” and “[o]ffer online or virtual services, including for, meeting with clients, providing counsel, or other professional services. ii. Hold meetings and collaborate online or by phone. iii. Alternate work teams or stagger shifts.”

Emergency Order #8 was a necessary intervention and recent numbers demonstrate that it is working. UW-Madison’s Smart Restart Plan puts this successful impact on community spread in certain jeopardy.

We are disturbed by UW’s weak plans for enforcement, which appear to be limited to posting signs, a messaging campaign, student “ambassadors,” and an online form to report concerns. We understand that there are legal barriers to enforcement of PHMDC orders against the UW-Madison Administration, but also understand, based on Madison City Attorney Michael Haas’s memo, that PHMDC is able to enforce orders against individuals on and off campus property.

UW-Madison Administration expects individuals on campus to comply with PHMDC orders while its own plan refuses to incorporate key pieces of Emergency Order #8.

UW’s messaging in this respect is misleading, and its actions place an unfair burden on students, who are likely to be the scapegoats for administrators’ poor decisions. The Smart Restart Plan relies in large part on young people to fully appreciate the risks of COVID-19 and comply with PHMDC guidelines.

Recent outbreaks at Central Michigan, Notre Dame, Iowa State, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and Tennessee lead us to believe that an outbreak is inevitable when tens of thousands of UW-Madison students come back to campus. UW Administration states that it will have contact tracers trained by PHMDC, but the plan lacks details on how many contact tracers will be hired and trained. Moreover, we expect there are unique and significant challenges to contact tracing due to the close proximities of campus living and learning environments. UW-Madison does not operate in a vacuum and food service and custodial workers and other staff, who live in communities across Dane County, are in close contact with students living on campus. Why bring everyone back to campus until the inevitable outbreak, which will require a vast amount of public health resources to address, and the potential spreading of the virus to multiple communities?

We understand that the job duties of some UW-Madison workers cannot be performed remotely. Workers, especially during the pandemic, deserve employment, payment, and health insurance continuity. Low wage workers, like those in food service and custodial positions who are more likely to be Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, are suffering disproportionately from COVID. It is unfair and immoral to add to this burden by forcing workers to choose between the health and safety of their families and a paycheck.

UW-Madison claims the Smart Restart Plan was developed using an equity lens despite the lack of input from campus stakeholders, including the University Labor Council which consists of 5 campus labor unions. Administration claims they consulted extensively with stakeholders, including students, but an open records request found that there was no survey of students. Madison365 recently reported that 86% of faculty, staff, and graduate student workers reported they are uncomfortable with Smart Restart.

As PHMDC knows, making policy decisions with an equity lens requires transparency, inclusion, and a consideration of unintended consequences and voices absent from the decision-making process. Were any representatives from campus labor and student organizations involved in developing the Smart Restart Plan? Please facilitate engagement with those most impacted by the re-opening plans, particularly populations most likely to suffer disproportionately from COVID-19.

Due to Dane County's current case count, PHMDC issued Emergency Order #9 on Friday August 21, canceling in-person classes for grades 3-12 in all Dane County schools and requiring all districts to move to virtual learning. Dane County must sustain certain, publicly disclosed metrics, for schools to re-open to in-person learning. UW-Madison's plans will make it very challenging for the county to meet the metrics, which will delay the return to in-person learning for younger students. We expect more from UW-Madison and its relationship with the Madison and Dane County community. Thank you for your attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,

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Sup. Elizabeth Doyle, D1
Sup. Richard Kilmer, D4
Sup. Elena Haasl, D5
Sup. Yogesh Chawla, D6
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Francesca Hong, Candidate for 76 Assembly District

Cc (via email): Dane County Board
Dane County Executive Joe Parisi
Madison Common Council
Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway