

June 11, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Honorable Governor Andrew M. Cuomo,

We are writing to you to advocate for regions to be given the complete authority to review and approve high school graduation plans that include in-person graduations. We acknowledge the changes you recently announced to the state-issued interim guidance on high school graduations to allow in-person ceremonies, however, we are still disappointed in the guidelines issued and feel they are limiting to the graduates and their families.

As you know, graduation is the culmination of more than a decade's worth of hard work. While our students have had so much upheaval in their lives these past few months, they and their teachers have met all the challenges thrown at them in a commendable fashion. As we witness the resilience and perseverance of our educational institutions, we have a renewed hope for our future. In light of these accomplishments, now more than ever before, is the time to truly celebrate our students and our future by providing the graduates and their families an in-person graduation; one that they can celebrate with their fellow graduates, together, in a safe and healthy manner.

A number of school districts in the Southern Tier have submitted safe, responsible, socially distanced graduation plans designed to protect the health and well-being of the graduates and their families. The eight counties of the Southern Tier believe we can work with our health departments and our school districts to provide an in-person graduation experience that our students and their families deserve while at the same time protecting the public health.

We understand the importance of maintaining the health and safety of our residents during this COVID-19 pandemic and respect the phased approach to reopening our region to ensure the goal of stopping the spread is achieved in the greatest manner.

The Southern Tier was among the first regions to begin the reopen process. We have one of the lowest COVID-19 infection rates in the state. Our public health metrics have continued to be well under the state established thresholds.

You have continually advised us to forget the emotion and "look at the data, look at the measurements, look at the science, and follow the facts." Applying those metrics to our decision-making involving graduations indicate that it can be done safely as all of those numbers have experienced a continual decrease in the Southern Tier region despite multiple violations of the mass gathering order during Memorial Day celebrations and the recent protest marches.

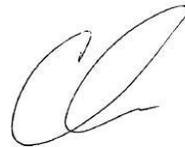
We are respectfully requesting that you ask the NYS Department of Health to re-examine the recent guidelines and allow county health departments to administer safe graduating guidelines. In addition, this would allow counties the authority to review and approve high school graduation plans that include in-person graduations.

We are NY Tough and we are also Southern Tier Strong. We appreciate your leadership and flexibility through this unprecedented crisis. Given the Southern Tier Region's positive healthcare data we feel that we can accommodate larger graduations with the appropriate standards and precautions. Let's work together to give the thousands of high school graduates and their families in the Southern Tier the graduations that they deserve.

Respectfully,



Jason T. Garnar, County Executive
Broome County



Christopher Moss, County Executive
Chemung County



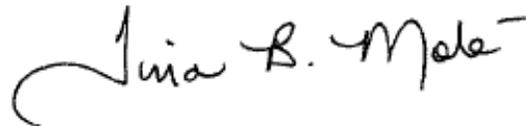
Jack Wheeler, County Manager
Steuben County



Timothy O'Hearn, County Administrator
Schuyler County



Martha Sauerbrey, Chair
Tioga County Legislature



Tina B. Molé, Chairman of the Board
Delaware County

Lawrence Wilcox, Chairman
Chenango County Board of Supervisors