



Governor Brian P. Kemp  
206 Washington Street SW  
111 State Capitol  
Atlanta, GA 30334

Commissioner Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H.  
Georgia Department of Public Health  
2 Peachtree Street, NW  
15<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Atlanta, GA 30303

April 21, 2020

Via Email

**Re: Collection and Release of COVID-19 Race/Ethnicity Data**

Dear Governor Kemp and Commissioner Toomey,

On behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union and the American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia, I write to urge your office to quickly collect and release complete aggregate race/ethnicity and other demographic data of COVID-19 infections and deaths to the extent consistent with medical and health privacy laws.

As other jurisdictions release racial data of COVID-19 infection and death, it is becoming increasingly urgent to protect all communities and identify communities that are in particular need of support. In order to protect everyone in the state and to save as many lives as possible, we are urging your office to collect and release this data rapidly.

At least 15 states and Washington D.C. have begun releasing racial breakdowns of COVID-19 in their jurisdictions.<sup>1</sup> The data released so far has shown that by and large Black people are dying at disturbingly disproportionate rates. For example, Black people represent 43 percent of

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<sup>1</sup> [See Characteristics of Laboratory-Confirmed Cases of COVID-19](#), Alabama Public Health (April 9, 2020); [COVID-19 Statistics, Illinois](#) Department of Public Health, (last accessed April 9, 2020); [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#), Louisiana Department of Public Health, (last accessed April 9, 2020); [Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak](#), Maryland Department of Health, (last accessed April 9, 2020); [Coronavirus Disease 2019 Cases in MA](#), Massachusetts Department of Public Health (April 9, 2020); [Michigan Data](#), Michigan.gov, (last accessed April 9, 2020); [Coronavirus Disease 2019](#), Mississippi State Department of Health (April 9, 2020); [Fatalities](#), New York State Department of Health, (last accessed April 10, 2020); [NC Cases COVID-19](#), North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (April 9, 2020); [COVID-19 in Virginia](#), Virginia Department of Health, (last accessed April 10, 2020); Kenya Evelyn, ["It's a racial justice issue': Black Americans are dying in greater numbers from Covid-19](#), The Guardian (April 8, 2020), ("On Monday, Washington's Mayor Muriel Bowser published coronavirus numbers by race for the first time: of the District's 24 deaths, 14 were of black patients."); [COVID-19 Wisconsin Data](#), Wisconsin Department of Health Services, (last accessed April 9, 2020); [COVID in New Mexico](#), New Mexico Department of Health, (last accessed April 16, 2020); [County of San Diego Daily 2019 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Race/Ethnicity Summary](#), County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (last accessed April 16, 2020); [Situation Update for Coronavirus Disease 2019](#), Minnesota Department of Health, (last accessed April 16, 2020).

COVID-19 deaths in Illinois, but make up only 14 percent of the state's population.<sup>2</sup> In Louisiana, Black people make up 32 percent of the state but represent over 70 percent of COVID-19 related deaths.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly alarming, in Mississippi, Black people make up 38 percent of the population but represent 52 percent of COVID-19 cases and 71 percent of reported deaths.<sup>4</sup> Cities with larger Black and Latino communities are especially seeing the inequalities in COVID-19 cases and deaths. In Milwaukee, Black people make up 67 percent of people who have died from COVID-19, while making up only 39 percent of the city's population.<sup>5</sup> In New York City, which now has more confirmed cases than anywhere else in the world, Latinos make up 29 percent of the population but 34 percent of COVID-19 deaths, and Black people make up 22 percent of the population but 28 percent of deaths.<sup>6</sup>

In Georgia specifically, Black people represent nearly 54 percent of COVID-19 cases and over 57 percent of COVID-19 deaths<sup>7</sup>, but make up only 32 percent of the state's population.<sup>8</sup> What's even more concerning are the disproportionate infection and death rates in Southwest Georgia, where access to affordable healthcare is extremely limited. The 14 county Southwest Georgia region<sup>9</sup> makes up over 14 percent of total COVID-19 cases and over 26 percent of COVID-19 deaths<sup>10</sup>, despite only accounting for 3 percent of Georgia's population.<sup>11</sup> These numbers are only a snapshot, as the complete racial and ethnicity data has not been fully reported and/or collected by the Georgia Department of Public Health. Currently, race is unknown for about 50 percent of cases in Georgia and the race is unknown for just under 6 percent of deaths.<sup>12</sup>

Existing health disparities and other social and economic inequalities make Black and brown people particularly vulnerable to contracting and dying from COVID-19. While public health officials recommend working from home to stop the spread of the virus, only 20 percent of Black workers and 16 percent of Latino workers are able to work from home.<sup>13</sup> Black people are also more likely to be uninsured and live in communities without access to quality healthcare facilities, leading to disproportionate rates of chronic diseases such as asthma, hypertension, and diabetes.<sup>14</sup> Black and Latina women are overrepresented as essential workers with Latina

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<sup>2</sup> See Kat Stafford, Meghan Hoyer & Aaron Morrison, [Outcry Over Racial Data Grows As Virus Slams Black Americans](#), AP (April 8, 2020); [COVID-19 Statistics](#), Illinois Department of Public Health, (last accessed April 9, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> See Kat Stafford, et al., [Outcry Over Racial Data Grows As Virus Slams Black Americans](#), AP (April 8, 2020); [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#), Louisiana Department of Public Health, (last accessed April 9, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> See Emily W. Pettus, [African Americans more than half of Mississippi virus deaths](#), AP (April 7, 2020); [Coronavirus Disease 2019](#), Mississippi State Department of Health (April 9, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> [Milwaukee County COVID-19 Dashboard](#), Milwaukee County, (last accessed April 10, 2020); [Milwaukee city, Wisconsin](#), United States Census Bureau, (last accessed April 10, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> [Fatalities](#), New York State Department of Health, (last accessed April 10, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Based on number of deaths, reported, where the race is known.

<sup>8</sup> [COVID-19 Statistics](#), Georgia Department of Public Health, (last accessed April 20, 2020 at 11:27:49); [U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts: Georgia](#); U.S. Census Bureau, (last accessed April 17, 2020)

<sup>9</sup> The counties examined are counties within the Southwest Department of the Georgia Department of Public Health. These counties include: Baker, Calhoun, Colquitt, Decatur, Dougherty, Early, Grady, Lee, Miller, Mitchell, Seminole, Terrell, Thomas, and Worth.

<sup>10</sup> Based on number of deaths, reported, where the race is known.

<sup>11</sup> [COVID-19 Statistics](#), Georgia Department of Public Health, (last accessed April 20, 2020 at 11:27:49); [U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts: Georgia](#); U.S. Census Bureau, (last accessed April 17, 2020)

<sup>12</sup> [COVID-19 Statistics](#), Georgia Department of Public Health, (last accessed April 20, 2020 at 11:27:49).

<sup>13</sup> See [Economic News Release](#), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (Sept. 24, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> See Reis Thebault, Andrew Ba Tran, & Vanessa Williams, [The Coronavirus Is Infecting and Killing Black Americans at an Alarmingly High Rate](#), Washington Post (April 7, 2020).

women making up 22 percent of women grocery store workers and Black women making up 27 percent of women home health aid workers.<sup>15</sup> In addition, people of color are overrepresented in industries that are rapidly laying off workers, leaving many uninsured.<sup>16</sup>

Given the vast disparities across the country and what we've seen from the Georgia specific data released thus far, it is likely that Black people and other communities of color are dying at even greater disproportionate rates than what is already evident. In order to effectively address this pandemic and direct resources where they are most needed, government officials and entities must quickly standardize, collect, and release race and ethnicity data surrounding COVID-19.

Without knowing the breadth of how COVID-19 is affecting communities in the state, public health officials, advocates, and affected members of the public will not have the tools necessary to tackle the inequalities this pandemic is exacerbating. Government entities must also provide adequate protections for all essential workers, especially those most vulnerable to the threat posed by COVID-19, including ensuring the equitable distribution of PPE/ventilators.

We urge your office to continue to collect and release aggregate race/ethnicity and other demographic data of COVID-19 infections and deaths, at haste, to the extent consistent with privacy laws, so that we may better protect all communities and identify those that are in particular need of support.

For Justice,



Andrea Young  
Executive Director  
ACLU of Georgia

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<sup>15</sup> See [The Wage Gap Has Made Things Worse for Women on the Front Lines of COVID-19](#), National Women's Law Center (Mar. 30, 2020).

<sup>16</sup> See Dan Burns, [How The Coronavirus Job Cuts Played Out by Sector and Demographics](#), Reuters (April 4, 2020), (showing that Asians and Latinos faced the highest rate of increase of unemployment and that the rate of unemployment for Black people is now 65% higher than the rate of unemployment for white people).