



March 24, 2020

Honorable Stephen K. Benjamin
Mayor, City of Columbia
1737 Main Street
Columbia, SC 29217

Dear Mayor Benjamin:

I hope this email finds you, your family members and staff safe and in good health during these uncertain times. On behalf of Columbia Housing's Board of Commissioners and staff, we'd like to thank you for your leadership to keep Columbia residents safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. I'd like to share with you the actions we've taken to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in our Columbia Housing communities. The safety and well-being of our residents and staff are among our highest priorities.

In February 2020, we dedicated a page on our website to communicate with our families and the general public about all of Columbia Housing's relevant *News & Information* in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A synopsis of virtual and written communications to our residents, program participants and landlords is summarized below.

- **1,600 letters** mailed to our **Public Housing Families**
- **4,000 letters** mailed to our **Housing Choice Voucher Program Families**
- **2,000 letters** mailed to our **Housing Choice Voucher Program Landlords**
- **26 COVID-19 e-blast messages** sent to our **9,714 website subscribers and social media followers**
- **150 COVID-19 signs and posters displayed** throughout our portfolio (administrative offices, high-rises, central office, community rooms, etc.,)

Our COVID-19 Response Timeline (<https://www.columbiahousingsc.org/covid-19-response>) of action steps is listed below. We will continue to update our action steps in accordance with recommendations from local, state and national public health officials.

MARCH

- **03.24.2020:** Executive Committee's approval to proceed with securing immediate [Statutory Relief](#) from our Congressional Delegation on administrative requirements that create an immediate threat to our staff and the residents we serve and is in direct opposition to the guidelines set forth to minimize the spread of COVID-19.
- **03.24.2020:** Submitted [Federal Regulatory Waiver Request](#) to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development to postpone specific requirements that we feel we will not be able to comply with unless we violate the guidelines set forth to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus.
- **03.19.2020:** [Letter to Housing Choice Voucher Participants and Landlords](#)
- **03.19.2020:** [Food and/or Meal Distribution Guidelines](#)
- **03.19.2020:** [Information for CH's Housing Choice Voucher Participants](#)

- **03.18.2020:** [Housing Choice Voucher Participants - Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- **03.18.2020:** Implemented staggered work schedules and teleworking options for staff
- **03.18.2020 :** Restricted Public Access to Property Mgmt Offices & Community Rooms
- **03.17.2020:** [Visitation Protocols for Senior High Rise Communities](#)
- **03.17.2020:** [Public Housing Residents - Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- **03.17.2020:** [Public Housing Rent, Maintenance and Public Health Directives](#)
- **03.17.2020:** [Letter to Public Housing Residents](#)
- **03.17.2020:** [COVID-19 Senior High-Rise Community Meetings](#): Dr. Melissa Nolan of the Arnold School of Public Health at the University of South Carolina and Dr. Eric Brennan from Prisma Health will be joining us in meeting with our residents in the following communities (**canceled due to update of protocols from public health officials**).
 - ✓ Arrington Manor
 - ✓ Oak Reid
 - ✓ Marion Street
 - ✓ Rosewood Hills
- **03.16.2020:** Restricted Public Access to Main Office Building
- **03.13.2020:** Notified all individuals having reserved the Tillis Center that due to COVID-19 and the CDC's recommendation on Social Distancing, we are [canceling all events at the Tillis Center](#) for the next two weeks. Deposits will be refunded and we will accommodate rescheduling these events after the CDC has lifted such recommendations.
- **03.11.2020:** Contacted PRISMA Health, SC DHEC regarding staff/resident training and possible quarantine measures should that need arise.
- **03.10.2020:** Hung 100 informational posters from the CDC about reducing the spread of the virus in the main office and tech services; distributed 150 signs and full-sized posters to Property Management teams to display in our housing communities and high rises.
- **03.10.2020:** WISTV ran a story citing our News Release - "[Columbia Housing announces precautionary steps to prevent the spread of coronavirus](#)"
- **03.09.2020:** Issued News Release via website and social media "[Columbia Housing's Actions to Address Corona Virus Concerns](#)"
- **03.09.2020:** Acquired hand sanitizer stations for the Main Office, Tech Services Building, Tillis Center and high rises; distributed disinfectant wipes and cleaning solution to Property Management team and Maintenance staff.
- **03.09.2020:** Fully implemented CDC recommendations:
 - ✚ Hand sanitizer stations will be placed in the following locations:
 - ✓ Headquarters & all Lobby Areas throughout our portfolio
 - ✓ Reception Areas
 - ✓ Administrative Offices
 - ✓ Conference Rooms
 - ✓ High-rise Buildings (Arrington Manor, Marion Street, Oak Reid, Rosewood)
 - ✓ Tillis Center
 - ✓ Any Other areas deemed appropriate
 - ✚ Disinfecting wipes will be distributed to Conference Rooms, Administrative Offices, Reception Areas; and any other areas deemed appropriate.
 - ✚ Columbia Housing's janitorial services contractor is disinfecting common areas and surfaces throughout Columbia Housing's headquarters at 1917 Harden Street, including elevator buttons, door handles, and faucets, and is communicating with the CDC for any guidance on additional recommendations for cleaning procedures.
 - ✚ Disposable gloves and pocket-size hand sanitizer dispensers will be ordered and distributed to inspectors, maintenance technicians, and Columbia Housing's staff who perform home visits in the course of their job responsibilities.

- ✚ Employees who are ill are encouraged to stay home.
 - ✚ Employees and residents are encouraged to wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; if soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol.
 - ✚ Columbia Housing is not ordering or providing face-masks at this time because the CDC specifically does not recommend that people who are well wear a face-mask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19 novel coronavirus. In addition, the U.S. Surgeon General posted a tweet on February 29 that said, "STOP BUYING MASKS! They are NOT effective in preventing the general public from catching #Coronavirus, ..."
- **03.04.2020:** Began the process of trying to procure sufficient hand sanitizer, bleach wipes, and disinfecting materials
 - **03.03.2020:** Issued News Release via the Website and Social Media "[What you Need to Know About Coronavirus](#)"

FEBRUARY

- **2.28.2020:** Deployed COVID-19 Task Force to activate staff involvement to address the coronavirus outbreak using principals outlined in Columbia housing's recently adopted Emergency Preparedness Plan. (November 2019)
- **02.28.2020:** Issued News Release via the Website and Social Media "[Columbia Housing Stresses Healthy Habits Amid Coronavirus Concerns](#)" included every day preventative measures that can be taken to avoid the virus. "We want our staff, residents and community partners to take every precaution to remain healthy and safe," says Interim Executive Director Ivory Mathews. "Many of these healthy habits are already incorporated into our daily routines; we just need to be mindful to take extra precautions with this heightened concern about coronavirus," concludes Mathews.

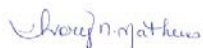
MID-LATE JANUARY & FEBRUARY

- Preparedness discussions began regarding possibilities and the need for staff to be aware and ready to act quickly if the virus begins to spread outside China

In conclusion, we realize, this is likely the first of many updates we'll provide to the City of Columbia as our community continues to implement preventive measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 novel coronavirus. If you have any questions, please feel free to give me a call at 803.667.0267 (mobile) or send me an email at imathews@columbiahousing.org.

All the best,

Ivory N. Mathews



Interim Executive Director

Copy:

Columbia Housing Board of Commissioners
Teresa Wilson, City Manager
City of Columbia City Council