

Gov. Wolf Calls for Mandated Race and Ethnicity Data Collection and Increased Testing Amid COVID-19

Harrisburg, PA – On a call today with reporters and Lt. Gov. John Fetterman about the newly formed Health Disparity Task Force, Governor Tom Wolf called for COVID-19 health care providers and medical facilities conducting tests to follow the Department of Health’s mandate to include race and ethnicity data in demographics provided to the department with COVID-19 test results. He also asked for more robust, free and accessible testing for minority and vulnerable populations.

From Gov. Wolf’s remarks:

“All Pennsylvanians deserve the same access to testing and treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic. That’s regardless of race, income, location, and every other factor. The goal for this task force is to help communicate issues with how the pandemic is affecting the state’s minority and vulnerable populations.

“One of the problems we have is that we have heard how COVID-19 is hitting minority populations – in particular African-Americans – hardest across the United States and anecdotally in Pennsylvania, but we lack the statistics needed to determine the severity of this issue here.

“Despite a mandate by Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine, 69% of race data is still unreported and there is little to no data when it comes to ethnicity.

“We need to get more medical professionals collecting and reporting race data about their patients

“We also need to make sure our vulnerable populations have equal access to testing. By identifying issues, like testing locations and hours of operation, and providing information on these locations to our minority communities, we can make sure testing is accessible to everyone.

“This will help us detect COVID-19 before it becomes widespread in a community.

“And we need to make sure testing is available to everyone, regardless of means, previous medical care, or existing relationships to a physician. This will help us identify difficult-to-detect cases.

“The Health Disparity Task Force, working with the Department of Health’s Office of Health Equity, will help us gather more specific information on how to tackle these issues, as well as identify others.”

Lt. Gov. Fetterman, added, “The task force has held three meetings so far, and our biggest concerns heard from these communities are improving data collection and increasing access to free testing. I thank the governor for taking our recommendations and immediately calling for action.”