August 3, 2020

Via Electronic Mail
The Honorable Bill Lee
Governor State Capitol, 1st Floor
600 Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. Blvd.
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Governor Lee:

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) is the nation’s leading organization of physicians providing care to women, with more than 60,000 physicians and partners in women’s health in our membership, including more than 725 in the State of Tennessee. Our members are on the frontlines of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, caring for pregnant patients and providing essential health care to women throughout their life course. As physician leaders in Tennessee, we write to you regarding our ongoing concerns about the spread of COVID-19 throughout the state of Tennessee and critical steps that we believe your administration can take to help mitigate the spread of disease. Specifically, we request that your administration issue a state-wide directive for people to wear masks in public places to help stop the spread of the virus.

As you know, the pandemic has already claimed more than 150,000 lives of people in the United States and the count continues to rise daily. The country has seen nearly five million confirmed cases of COVID-19. Last week, the state saw its highest seven-day average of new daily cases and members of the White House’s COVID-19 Taskforce warned that Tennessee is likely to become the next hotspot for spread of the virus.¹ The COVID-19 pandemic raises particular concerns for our members and the patients for whom they care. Physicians and medical professionals on the frontlines of responding to the pandemic are at high risk of contracting COVID-19, threatening not only their own health and safety but also the strength of the physician workforce in the state where there are projections of an increasing shortage of obstetrician-gynecologists.² COVID-19 is also concerning for our patients, including women of color, who are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

To mitigate the spread of disease and protect the health and safety of Americans, the U.S. Centers for Disease Prevention and Control recommend that cloth face coverings be worn in public to prevent the spread of COVID-19³, as does ACOG. Following this guidance, states throughout the country, including neighboring states such as Arkansas, Alabama, North Carolina, have issued directives requiring that

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people wear cloth face coverings/masks when leaving home.\textsuperscript{4} We ask that your administration do the same as these and many other states and issue a directive instructing Tennesseans to wear cloth coverings/face masks when leaving home.

This is important for the health of all people living in the state. Of particular concern are the patients most impacted by COVID-19. This pandemic hit certain populations the hardest—those with underlying health conditions; those who cannot practice physical distancing, such as health care workers, essential workers, incarcerated people, and people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity; and those who already face systemic inequities.

It is especially important to ensure that frontline workers like physicians, health care professionals, and first responders, who are already putting themselves at risk every day, are not needlessly exposed to COVID-19 and the health care workforce remains stable and strong so that all people living in Tennessee have the medical care they need.

The COVID-19 pandemic is threatening the health and safety of people in Tennessee, throughout the country, and throughout the world. It is imperative that we all do what we can to help slow the spread of disease and ensure that individuals in our state are able to live healthy lives. We ask that you consider this request for the safety of those in our state, including physicians and frontline workers.

ACOG is here as a resource for you and your administration. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

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