



Committees:

Insurance
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Ohio Latino Affairs
Southern Ohio Agriculture and Community
Development

Jessica E. Miranda

State Representative

Dear Speaker Householder,

I am writing to address what happened last week with respect to the staffing of my office and how a positive case of COVID-19 was handled. I want to make sure something like this never happens to my office or any office in the General Assembly again, and I want to be sure that we are following all duties to provide a safe workplace and safe public spaces for anyone that wishes to interact with the General Assembly.

My legislative aide was visited by Kim Hartman and Craig Fleck in person in his office and told he needed to leave the building because he had been exposed to someone with COVID-19. They told him they could not reveal who it was who had tested positive, where he may have had contact with that person, nor when the contact allegedly occurred. Had they shared even minimal information with him, the case of mistaken identity could have been avoided entirely. My staff asked if he could work from home and they told him he could not. He was told he would have to use his own federal COVID-19 sick leave.

There are several troubling things about how this occurred. First, I was not notified by these administrative staffers before they removed my office staff. Second, my office should not have been visited by anyone in person. It's impossible to properly socially distance with three people in an aide's office and, by closing the door behind them, air would be less able to circulate out of the room. Third, my aide had to go the rest of the day thinking he would not be able to work from home before it was negotiated by the minority chief of staff that he would be given that option. My staff was told he would have to use his federal COVID-19 leave, which would deplete the leave available to him if he were later actually affected by COVID-19. Fourth, the local health department was not contacted about the person who tested positive in accordance with the Return to Work plan emailed to all House staff by Hartman on May 19 after most staff had been required to return on May 4. Fifth, the person who was actually exposed to the individual who tested positive was not timely notified

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and was, therefore, still in the Riffe office spaces potentially exposing others to the virus. Finally, the rest of the House members and staff were inexplicably not notified of the positive case and were left to find out only through the rumor mill.

It later turned out that my aide had not had contact with the person who tested positive and in fact was misidentified at some stage of this flawed process. For the next 12 hours he worried about this alleged exposure and how he would cover the office and his time, he scheduled a test, and he informed a member of his household who then had to take leave from a health care job because of the scare. He was also an innocent bystander in the misinformation battle that took place on social media. Our staff should not be wrongly accused of violating House policies. This pandemic is hard enough for everyone.

Since the incident with my office, I have also confirmed that Republican staff, like their members, have not been wearing masks, have not been staying in their offices, and have not been staying at safe distances. I learned that mandatory temperature readings performed on staff each morning, in addition to being done by people not wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) and not protecting themselves at all times from virus exposure, have been showing temperatures of 89 and 90 degrees. At 94 degrees, one is in hypothermia. Clearly, this was even more of a sham safety procedure than I had initially thought given that people who are shedding the virus often have a normal temperature.

Each of the things I've described is very serious on its own. Combined, they are a picture of chaos. We absolutely must do better by our staff and by the public going forward. Like most large workplaces in traditional office environments, the House should remain on Work From Home until it is safe to come back to the office. We are capable of working almost entirely from our homes and should do so to protect those who cannot. We should not be taking unnecessary risks, potentially becoming COVID-19 disease vectors and hurting others in Columbus or back in our districts.

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Speaker, I stand ready to work with you and all of my colleagues to make sure we have the best policies in place to provide safe working policies that prioritize teleworking, a safe workplace and a safe environment for the public when in-person meetings are absolutely necessary, and safe plans for the possibilities ahead of us. I hope to have your assurance that my office staff will face no repercussions from this unfortunate incident because he had no fault in any of this.

Ohio workers, including our staff, have a right to a safe workplace. The public have a right to safety at the legislature. No one should have to risk their lives or the lives of their families to interact with their government. I look forward to working together for safety during this pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jessica E. Miranda". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jessica E. Miranda

State Representative
Ohio's 28th House District
614-466-8120

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