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August 17, 2020

Dear Chairman Ramsey, President Hans, Chancellor Guskiewicz and Provost Blouin,

On behalf of the entire Chapel Hill community, we are writing to express our continued concerns regarding the toll that the re-opening of the UNC campus is having on the health, safety and overall well-being of our entire community. If not addressed immediately, this situation will have irreversible and lasting repercussions.

This weekend, we learned that four clusters of positive cases in congregate housing situations have been identified. Unfortunately, this avoidable outcome is the direct result of decisions made by the university administration and exacerbated by many students' disregard for the University's Community Standards as well as state and local laws.

Just days after students returned to campus, we were deeply disappointed to learn of a large gathering at a UNC sorority house. Since then, we have been inundated with reports of other large gatherings and pictures of students throughout town without masks or social distancing. We have also just received word of a large party in Raleigh that drew participants from campus communities across the area – including from UNC.

At this point, given what we know about how this virus spreads, the number of positive cases at the university and in Chapel Hill is expected to rise. As a result, we are worried about the impacts to the broader community – including the health of university and local employees and vulnerable populations, the capacity of our testing and healthcare systems, and the recovery of our local business community.

Furthermore, we are deeply disturbed by the heightened levels of stress, anxiety and division being felt throughout the community along with the concerns about personal safety expressed by students and residents alike. The vacuum left by the university's decision to take minimal responsibility for students when they are off campus has meant that the need for monitoring and reporting has fallen largely to peers and neighbors, which is neither appropriate nor fair.

Clearly, the Carolina Together plan is not working. Therefore, we request that the University take immediate and significant actions to keep these initial outbreaks from escalating exponentially.

1. We recognize that the University's hands are currently tied regarding decisions about remote versus in-person learning, but this must change. We strongly urge you to support calls from the Chair of the Faculty Executive Committee and the Chair of the Carolina Black Caucus asking the Board of Governors (BOG) to allow each Chancellor to make decisions for their campus based on the needs of their individual institutions and local communities.

2. We ask that you continue to work with the Town and the Orange County Health Department to formulate a plan that puts undergraduate students in a better position for a successful college learning experience this year while also safeguarding their overall health and the health of our entire community.

3. We want to reiterate our earlier requests for the University to assume a greater share of responsibility for various aspects of the pandemic response related to campus re-opening, and to commit expanded resources to those efforts including:

- Providing more frequent updates to the UNC-Chapel Hill CV-19 Dashboard and laying out a clear plan for operational toggles and off-ramps so that all parties have the information they need to proactively address changing conditions.
- Articulating clear consequences for students who violate the UNC Community Standards and local ordinances, both on campus and off.
- Establishing a more comprehensive and proactive university-led effort for monitoring compliance, receiving reports, and following up on safety or gathering violations, both on campus and off.
- Assisting and monitoring all students on campus and off who need to self-isolate or quarantine due to exposure or illness, to ensure that students adhere to isolation protocols in Chapel Hill and that those wishing to return home are not taking the virus with them.
- Working with UNC Health to expand capacity for student testing (including sampled or pooled surveillance testing in high-density student residential settings) and working with Town and County partners to ensure sufficient resources to perform off-campus contact tracing.
- Providing immediate guidance to students, faculty, and staff regarding expectations for travel outside of the community to prevent spread of the virus.

We strongly believe that the University must be allowed to pursue the off-ramp to virtual learning, but we are, also, aware that even if campus closes, many students will remain in off-campus housing. Thus, addressing these issues is vital for the health and well-being of our community.

As we continue to navigate these unprecedented times, we think it is critical to work together quickly and decisively to make sure we are doing everything in our collective power to be “one community” keeping everyone in it safe.

Sincerely,

Mayor Pam Hemminger
Mayor Pro Tem Michael Parker
Council Member Jess Anderson
Council Member Allen Buansi
Council Member Hongbin Gu
Council Member Tai Huynh
Council Member Amy Ryan
Council Member Karen Stegman

Cc: Dr. Mimi Chapman, Chair of the Faculty
Assistant Dean Dawna Jones, Chair, Carolina Black Caucus