

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1013

September 7, 2021

The Honorable Brian P. Kemp
Governor of Georgia
206 Washington Street
Suite 203, Georgia State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Governor Kemp:

We are writing to request your attention to Georgia's recent spike in COVID-19 hospitalizations and the need to enact measures that will preserve hospital capacity. With the COVID-19 Delta variant expanding to every corner of our state, we have seen a sharp increase in the number of confirmed cases—particularly among children and the unvaccinated. Hospital systems are being forced to make difficult decisions about how to care for patients when there aren't enough resources to go around. Our state is at a critical point in its fight against the pandemic and as elected officials, we must prioritize the health and wellbeing of our citizens above all other considerations. As such, we strongly urge you to direct the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) to place a temporary pause on elective surgeries in all Georgia hospitals and immediately extend licensing requirement waivers for hospitals and healthcare workers who can provide critical services to patients in need.

Emergency rooms in Georgia are currently experiencing excruciatingly long wait times as hospitals fill to capacity. Local reports of skyrocketing cases, a limited number of available beds, and staffing shortages are stretching already-limited resources to the brink of collapse.¹ The state tracking system shows that nearly 92% of emergency room beds are currently occupied. On Tuesday, August 31st, the state reported that hospitals had 5,656 COVID patients, about 50 patients below the January peak of 5,709.² While modeling continues to predict a surge of serious COVID-19 cases that will inevitably need extended hospital care, hospital systems will be unable to meet the needs of patients dealing with the disease.

Hospitals, physicians, and nurses are presently being called on to treat patients with non-urgent procedures or other surgeries that can otherwise be postponed to a later date. We urge you to direct the DPH to issue a statewide temporary pause of inpatient elective surgeries for all Acute Care, Critical Care, and Children's hospitals in the state. By pausing elective surgeries, hospitals will be able to provide additional beds, resources, and critical staff to areas requiring a higher level of care. Additionally, many of these procedures can be delayed for up to four weeks or longer without substantially changing a patient's outcome.

¹ Northeast Georgia Health System. Message from President & CEO Carol Burrell. Facebook, 26 Aug. 2021, 12 p.m., <https://www.facebook.com/myNGHS/videos/1848863931951724/>. Accessed 28 Aug. 2021

² COVID-19 Georgia Geospatial Data Hub: Statewide Data and Maps of Regional Hospital Capacity. <https://covid-hub.gio.georgia.gov/>. Accessed 31 Aug. 2021.

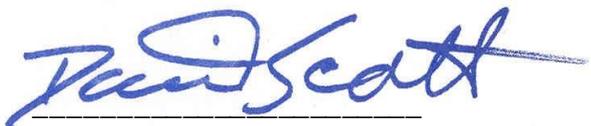
At the same time, we are concerned about dozens of Georgia hospitals reporting severe ER crowding and various forms of diversion practices due to capacity problems. This surge in hospitalizations is exacerbating a shortage of health care workers in the state—especially critical care nurses trained to care for those affected with the disease. In a state that already has one of the nation’s lowest ratios of nurses to population, the shortage of nurses continues to jump month after month. As of last week, 11,000 nursing positions across the state sat vacant—with more than 1,700 of those in intensive care units.³ While we recognize and commend your efforts to hire additional contract healthcare staff, deploy Georgia National Guard troops to overwhelmed hospitals, and allow for the Georgia Board of Nursing to issue temporary permits to get nurses in the field more quickly, the shortage of available staff persists.

In tandem with previously enacted measures, we urge you to extend licensing requirement waivers for hospitals and healthcare workers beyond the September 19, 2021 deadline.⁴ Extending licensing waivers can continue to facilitate the expedited authorization of credentials for retired or inactive healthcare professionals, defer continuing education requirements for certain professions, and suspend statutes around new healthcare providers who are seeking licenses. More importantly, it can replenish the worst-hit Georgia hospitals that may be struggling to retain staff and care for sick patients.

To that end, we urge you to take the necessary steps to ensure the availability of adequate hospital capacity to provide the best possible care for COVID-9 patients. Placing a temporary pause on elective procedures and extending licensing requirement waivers for hospitals and healthcare workers would demonstrate Georgia’s commitment to our healthcare community and your continued dedication to eradicating the pandemic. As evident by your recent and swift action in relaxing regulations for shipping compressed oxygen amid supply shortages, we ask that your office take the same urgency to address these critical issues.

We stand ready to assist you as you respond to this unprecedented crisis, and respectfully request that you take our concerns into consideration. Our communities are counting on us.

Sincerely,



David Scott
Member of Congress



Henry C. “Hank” Johnson Jr.
Member of Congress

³ Hart, Ariel; Mariano, Willoughby “Georgia Nursing Shortage at Crisis Levels.” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 20 Aug. 2021 <https://www.ajc.com/news/coronavirus/georgia-nursing-shortage-at-crisis-levels/G37X6GW2HRDEXGWB6OS6OBA5KE/> Accessed 30 Aug. 2021.

⁴ Executive Order Issued by Gov. Kemp *Regarding the State of Emergency for Continued COVID-19 Economic Recovery – Regulatory Suspensions*. Available Here: [EO 8.19.21.02](https://www.governor.ga.gov/eo/8192102)