

**A RESOLUTION TO BE SUBMITTED BY  
LEGISLATORS GREENE, LORIGO, TODARO AND MILLS**

**Re: A Resolution creating a county-wide COVID-19 at-home testing program**

**WHEREAS**, the COVID-19 virus has impacted our community for more than 18 months and the number of sick residents is among the highest we have ever seen; and

**WHEREAS**, shutdowns have destroyed businesses and taken a generation of wealth from our community as many of the businesses that were forced to close during the shutdowns never reopened; and

**WHEREAS**, former-Governor Cuomo's vaccine mandate has led to a staffing cut at area hospitals of nearly 2% of the total workforce, at a time when we need healthcare workers more than ever, but rates have continued to rise. Despite the prevalence of the COVID-19 vaccine in our community, the numbers of infected and hospitalized in 2021 is similar to 2020 when there was no vaccine available; and

**WHEREAS**, masking requirements have slowed the spread of the disease on a national scale. Locally, County Executive Poloncarz has maintained a mask mandate since the spring of 2020 to some degree, despite this mandate the number of infected residents is as high now as they were last year at this time; and

**WHEREAS**, wide-spread testing, which has been enacted in counties across the United States, could be a better solution to slowing the spread through Erie County. Providing residents with the opportunity to be tested through an at-home test kit would allow individuals to know whether or not they are carrying the virus before they attend family gatherings or go to social events; and

**WHEREAS**, Monroe County ordered 750,000 at-home tests to be freely distributed to their residents. They utilized distribution centers allowing residents to quickly and easily pick up at-home antigen test kits. These kits will allow residents who have concerns about COVID-19 to test themselves and then make an informed decision about whether or not they should go to their next family party, public social event, or work-related gathering; and

**WHEREAS**, the state of New Hampshire has recently doubled their state-run COVID-19 testing sites and has started their own at-home antigen and PCR testing program, on the first day 800,000 of their tests were taken home. New Hampshire's contract for the antigen tests is \$8 million and they anticipate purchasing more; and

**WHEREAS**, Massachusetts has also announced they plan to distribute 2 million at-home COVID tests, their contract for the test kits is expected to cost \$10 million; and

**WHEREAS**, Colorado has also implemented an at-home testing program. The state works their program by mail to provide residents with at-home test kits that use saliva instead of a nasal swab. Their program requires residents to mail their sample in for testing, but the results are typically back in 48-72 hours and the kits have a 98% accuracy; and

**WHEREAS**, Erie County should engage in a similar county-wide push to provide testing to all residents of Erie County. The ease of free at-home test kits could make it more likely for our residents to get themselves and their children tested. In turn, the more frequent testing can cut back on the occurrences of super-spreader events thereby limiting community spread and all the challenges that come with it.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT**

**RESOLVED**, that this honorable body acknowledges that data gathered in 2020 by contact tracers and released by the New York State Department of Health clearly demonstrates that more than 73.84% of COVID-19 positive persons contracted the virus in a household or social gathering and 7.81% of positive persons contracted the virus in a healthcare setting and no other transmission source accounted for more than 2.02% of the spread; and, be it further

**RESOLVED**, that this honorable body acknowledges that Governor Kathy Hochul has implemented mask mandates across the state as of Monday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, but recognizes that when Erie County was the only regional county with the same mask mandates imposed, both our positivity and hospitalization rates were rising faster than our neighboring counties who did not impose similar restrictions, despite the fact that thousands of Erie County residents were leaving the county to dine, shop and entertain themselves; and, be it further

**RESOLVED**, that this honorable body requests that the New York State Department of Health and the Erie County Department of Health release updated contact tracing data that shows the current top thirty (30) exposure sources; and, be it further

**RESOLVED**, that absent the State and County's willingness to release updated exposure data, we must rely on 2020 data that concludes COVID-19 is not being widely spread in hair salons, gyms, theatres, auto-dealers, places of business, places of worship, and retail stores. Rather the highest levels of transmission are occurring at home and in healthcare settings, rendering our current masking mandates ineffective against actual spread and concludes that we must retreat from policies that encourage people to stay at home and in community gatherings and embrace a large scale testing policy that allows people who feel ill free and convenient access to rapid COVID-19 tests that will provide them a quick answer as to whether or not they should isolate themselves from family, friends and society in order to stop the spread of the virus; and, be it further

**RESOLVED**, that the County Executive is hereby directed to immediately purchase a sufficient number of COVID-19 at-home test kits and that such test kits be distributed from easily accessible pick-up sites situated throughout Erie County based on population; and, be it further

**RESOLVED**, that within fourteen (14) days from passage of this resolution, Erie County shall establish a minimum of fifteen (15) distribution centers situated throughout the county with each serving an approximate population of 60,000 persons, for the purposes of distributing free, fast, and reliable at-home COVID-19 tests to residents; and, be it further

**RESOLVED**, that each resident be allowed to pick up one free testing kit in the first thirty (30) days and any additional tests shall be provided at the discretion of the Erie County Health Department; and

**RESOLVED**, that the Budget Director is hereby authorized to establish a 2021 year-end surplus allocation to fund the aforementioned projects and is then directed to provide the County Legislature a project budget within 60 days, and be it further

**RESOLVED**, that certified copies of this resolution be provided to the County Executive, County Comptroller, Director of Budget and Management, Commissioner of Health, Commissioner of Emergency Services, all 3 City Mayors, all 16 Village Mayors and all 25 Town Supervisors in Erie County.

Fiscal Impact: The cost of the program is contingent upon the number of tests purchased initially and the rate of distribution of said test kits