

SUSPENSION

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

Re: Authorization for the Purchase of 1 million COVID-19 rapid tests

WHEREAS, members of the minority caucus have called for a more robust testing program for county residents as early as September of 2021 in an effort to stem the predicted COVID surge related to a return to school and the Thanksgiving holiday; and

WHEREAS, members of this honorable body again called for the provision of more test kits and the use of more rapid tests leading into the Christmas and winter holiday season in the face of the Omicron variant, culminating with the introduction of Intro. 25-4 (2021); and

WHEREAS, in December of 2021 Intro. 25-4 (2021) called for the implementation of a countywide at-home testing program. At the time, the majority caucus sent the resolution to committee with no discussion. The majority caucus provided no committee discussion on the resolution, the version that was discharged and passed at Session on January 20th of 2022, five weeks after it was introduced, simply called for the state to send more test kits and authorized the Executive to purchase more as a compliment to the federal government's at-home testing program, which did not begin arriving until last week; and

WHEREAS, the Minority Caucus proposal, if approved as introduced, would have left the details of the administration of the program up to the County Executive. It called for him to purchase a "sufficient number" of test kits and required the Executive to set up 15 distribution centers across the county. The term "distribution center" was left to the County Executive to define but could have easily included current testing centers, specific pharmacies, publicly owned buildings, or empty parking lots with easy access; and

WHEREAS, our failure to appropriately act in advance of the Omicron variant and the winter holidays likely contributed to the differences in transmission rates, positivity rates, current hospitalizations and death rates in Erie County compared to surrounding counties who have adopted a more significant home testing program for their residents; and

WHEREAS, by the end of January, 2022, Erie County has received approximately 60,000 at-home test kits for distribution to residents. Unfortunately, this falls far short of the 1.5 million tests provided to residents of Monroe County by January 13th; and

WHEREAS, the results of neighboring counties and the experiences of counties across the nation have shown the provision of at home testing supplies is a significant weapon to combat the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. Erie County needs to adopt meaningful policy today that will help slow the spread of whatever variant our residents face next.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

SUSPENSION

RESOLVED, that this honorable body hereby directs and authorizes Erie County Executive Mark C. Poloncarz to purchase 1 million COVID-19 rapid tests immediately, and create plans for a public distribution program; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that this honorable body authorizes the use of funds from Account 516044, Fund Center 12700, for this purchase; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that this honorable body further authorizes the Budget Director to make any transfers necessary to facilitate this specific purchase; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that certified copies of this resolution be forwarded to Erie County Executive Mark C. Poloncarz, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, the Director of Budget and Management, and any other party deemed necessary and proper.

Fiscal Impact: The cost will be contingent upon market prices for reliable COVID-19 test kits.