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Susanne R. Young, Secretary

TO: David Bellini, VSEA President
CC: Steve Howard, VSEA Executive Director
FROM: Susanne Young, Secretary of Administration
DATE: March 15, 2020
RE: AoA Response to 3/14/20 VSEA Letter

Dear David:

Thank you for your letter of March 14 sent on behalf of all State employees who are members of the VSEA. I appreciate the letter and agree we share the goal of ensuring the health and safety of our employees and the Vermonters they serve. The Administration is working with the most current data and medical expertise available. Admittedly it is frustrating as what we learn and the advice that follows is changeable and has changed frequently since the inception of the COVID-19 spread.

What has not changed is the fact that most individuals, if infected, will suffer mild to moderate symptoms. The most vulnerable are older individuals as well as those with chronic medical conditions. Those employees should rest assured that the Administration will work with them to address and alleviate their concerns. The Governor directed that telecommuting be encouraged and the Department of Human Resources issued additional guidance today. Any employee who has not taken advantage of our telecommuting policy should discuss options with their supervisor as soon as practicable. Telecommuting, as you point out, is not an option for those who do certain jobs in state government. Those agencies and departments have, or will be, implementing strategies that will prioritize the work and mitigate the risk of the spread of COVID-19.

Your letter also asks that further mitigation efforts be taken to curtail public access to state-owned and state-leased buildings. First, the Department of Buildings and General Service implemented, in the past two weeks, protocols for increased attention to building cleaning and supporting good hygiene practices within buildings that house state employees. This weekend, posters were distributed to BGS liaisons to post at the entrance of all state buildings that will encourage all who enter the building to review the screening questions on the poster and to refrain from entering the building if the individual answered "yes" to any question.

Additionally, on Friday, guidance for [workplace safety and hygiene](#) was issued and distributed to all appointing authorities that encouraged commonsense behavior at work including social distancing



strategies. As more employees who can telework do, the lower volume of employees in a given space will allow for the greater success of these strategies as well.

The Administration also shares your concern about the availability of paid leave as outlined in your letter for those impacted by COVID-19 and the isolation policies that have been instituted. Since we meet last week with VSEA leadership, research has been completed on many fronts, including the expansion of a sick leave bank, whether workers' compensation may apply in some cases, the applicability of Congressional action on Friday, and other ways we can mitigate potential economic burdens on employees.

I appreciate you reaching out on these issues and look forward to continuing our work together this week. I appreciate that you shared with your membership the link to the Vermont Department of Health website which is continually updated, and would also appreciate if you would share the link to the Vermont Department of Human Resources website at

https://humanresources.vermont.gov/covid_19_resource_page where employee updates are posted.

A memo to all state employees was sent this evening, which can be found on our website at <https://aoa.vermont.gov/bulletins/memos>, incorporating the latest VDH/CDC guidance. All employees will be encouraged to stay current with these two sites.

As always, I encourage continued communication on this important matter.