

SENATE OF VIRGINIA

BILL DESTEPH
8TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT
PART OF THE CITY OF VIRGINIA BEACH

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COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REHABILITATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES
TRANSPORTATION

May 15, 2020

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam
Governor of Virginia
Patrick Henry Building
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Northam:

As we begin implementing Phase One of your plan to re-open the Commonwealth, I write to express frustration at being excluded from Zoom and other calls with area leaders that discuss matters of importance to my district.

Of particular note was a conference call at 10:00 a.m. this morning, which was set up at my request and coordinated with Chief of Staff Clark Mercer. Despite my having previously asked to be included on any calls related to the hotels and business community in my district, and having specifically requested and arranged this call, I was expressly prohibited from participating. I was told my exclusion was to prevent this call from being “political.”

There is nothing political about these kinds of communications. As Senator for the 8th District, I represent all constituents regardless of party affiliation. However, if, as I was told, the reason for my exclusion was to ensure the teleconference was purely “non-political,” why were other elected public officials allowed to participate?

The district I represent in the Senate of Virginia encompasses the entire Virginia Beach Oceanfront and the many businesses and restaurants located there. I am also a business owner here in Virginia Beach. I should not have been prohibited from this call.

I am honored to represent the 8th District, and my office is committed to serving our constituents. We have been extremely busy fielding constituent calls and emails regarding difficulties during the pandemic, especially issues with the Virginia Unemployment Commission (VEC) and the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). We do not distinguish between residents of the 8th district and other areas of the Commonwealth nor do we filter requests by partisan affiliation. We assist anyone and everyone who contacts us, no matter where they live or their concern. I can only represent the people of Virginia if I have all the information available at any given time.

For this reason, I implore you to reconsider this stance on excluding elected legislators. It does not serve my constituents nor the people of Virginia well, and it is they who have entrusted us to represent them.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill DeSteph".

Bill DeSteph