March 19, 2020

re: City of Phoenix COVID-19 Response

Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council,

As you consider the implications Friday’s vote and Phoenix’s ongoing COVID-19 response, **we ask that you align your gaze toward one common objective for the immediate future: preventing death by slowing the spread of the disease.**

Vitalyst Health Foundation is well-versed in the imperative to address underlying determinants of health, and we stand with you in the pursuit to mitigate the social and economic effects of this pandemic. Over the past 20+ years, Vitalyst has evolved from a funder of medical supplies to an investor in health, now focusing a majority of our energies toward broader community-wide issues that drive health outcomes. These social determinants of health (e.g., food security, housing, transportation and employment) are at the core of what we do. They are part of our daily work, and we’ve promoted this multisector approach to health throughout our state.

Today, however, we are faced with a unique situation where health, in its traditional sense, must be the primary objective. The worlds of philanthropy, social services and private industry are stepping up to the best of our abilities to support communities through this difficult period, but we need the authority of our municipal and state governments to slow the spread as quickly as possible.

We acknowledge that this is simple in concept, but difficult in practice. It means prioritizing scarce resources toward populations most at risk. It means real, short term hardship in exchange for long term health – in exchange for life. These tradeoffs are not taken lightly. Livelihoods may suffer, but lives will be saved.

Fortunately, Arizona is home to highly qualified professionals who are trained to address this challenge and can provide direction through these uncharted waters. Arizona’s public health, healthcare and research communities agree: the fastest route back to a sense of normal is to slow the spread. Homeless shelters need assistance relocating high-risk residents. Hospitals need additional space to keep those who are infected separate from those who are healthy. Residents need guidance and frequent updates about best practices to prevent contracting and spreading the disease.

During these unparalleled times, we recognize the gravity of the decisions that stand before you, and we are grateful for your leadership. The consequences of our collective action (or inaction) in the days and weeks ahead will create ripples that will be felt long into the future. We all have a role to play in ending this pandemic. The faster we act, the faster Phoenix can return to the vibrant, ever-growing community we know and love.

We urge the Council to act swiftly. We urge the Council to act on behalf of the lives that can be saved. We stand with you and offer our assistance.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Pfister