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PATRICK J. CALLAHAN
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TO: Department of Education and all Public and Non-Public Schools

Recent events related to the COVID-19 Pandemic have resulted in questions and concerns regarding celebrations planned to recognize students, as well as ceremonies intended to honor New Jersey school graduates of the Class of 2020. While it is recognized that milestones such as graduations deserve the acknowledgement of the school and parent communities, it is critical to understand the need to acknowledge academic achievements in ways that do not compromise or endanger public health during the COVID-19 emergency.

Executive Order No.107, signed by Governor Murphy on March 21, 2020, directs New Jersey residents to remain at home except to obtain goods and services from identified essential businesses, to obtain takeout food/drink from dining establishments, to seek medical attention/law enforcement services, to visit family, report to work, exercise under specific guidelines, or leave home for educational, religious, or political reasons. It is also permissible to leave home for fear of health/safety concerns, or to leave home at the direction of law enforcement/government. But even when someone is leaving their home for a permissible reason, they are not allowed to participate in any gatherings. As my Administrative Order No. 2020-04 explains, any event, including a graduation hat has more than 10 people in attendance, would be in violation of Executive Order No. 107.

Executive Order No. 107 and Administrative Order No. 2020-4 can be found here:

https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-107.pdf
https://nj.gov/governor/news/ao/docs/AO%202020-4%20Gatherings.pdf

In light of the components of Executive Order No. 107, and in the best interest of the health and safety of the public, in-person ceremonies, including graduations, all parades, including "wave parades," that invite people to gather at a certain location, proms, and other similar celebrations violate the enumerated conditions of the order, and should therefore be cancelled or postponed until such time as these restrictions are lifted. Until such time, virtual celebrations and other remote forms of recognition should take the place of any in-person or public ceremonies.

Sincerely,

Colonel Patrick J. Callahan
State Director of Emergency Management