

COVID-19



The COVID-19 pandemic has induced a health care crisis and an economic crisis that none of us anticipated. Consequently, as political leaders, we have all had to adapt to this new condition drawing upon our own experience and exercising our best judgment.

I am very proud of the way DeKalb County has continued to operate under these conditions. I particularly respect and appreciate the leadership that CEO Michael Thurmond has provided for all of us. He has demonstrated the steadiness and decisiveness required for a time such as this. When CEO Thurmond issued Executive Order No. 20 – 001 on March 23, 2020, Declaring a State of Emergency in DeKalb County, I had been the Presiding Officer of the Board of Commissioners for 70 days. Clearly, some adjustments had to be made to how the BOC conducted our business, and I was responsible for leading us through this transition. In an email that I sent to my BOC colleagues a few days after the declaration, I made the following four points:

- 1** This situation is unprecedented. It will probably get worse before it gets better.
- 2** Those of us charged with decision-making responsibilities are doing the best we can with the information that we have in front of us at any given time. I have never been shy about making a tough or seemingly controversial call, and I never will be.
- 3** A Universal COVID-19 Response Playbook does not exist. Anyone claiming to know all the right moves to make in every circumstance that arises from this crisis, simply stated, does not know what they are talking about.
- 4** Given the above, I think we might be better served if we just gave each other a break.

I stand by those words. It has been said that adversity builds character – but that is not entirely true. What is truer is that adversity reveals character. As this crisis has evolved, this has certainly proven to be the case for better and for worse.

Overall, I am grateful to my BOC colleagues for their flexibility and support as we have adapted to these circumstances together and continued to discharge our duties for the people of DeKalb County, and I am honored to serve with all of them.

Likewise, I have been very impressed with municipal leaders throughout DeKalb County. Several of the Mayors had just taken office in January when they were faced with dealing with this pandemic's effects and leading their respective cities through it. The grit and grace that many of our municipal leaders have demonstrated have been inspiring to me. And I believe that they were also called to lead for a time such as this.

As Mayor of Pine Lake, I've worked with Commissioner Bradshaw for the entirety of his first term. After taking office, Steve immediately established a quarterly roundtable meeting with all central DeKalb Mayors, giving us a regular opportunity to circulate our ideas and leadership challenges while staying current on a county and cross-city level. It also proved to be a forum demonstrating the Commissioner's responsiveness to problems each of us aired that needed his assistance.

I count Steve Bradshaw as an esteemed and trusted colleague and have sought out his leadership company during this turbulent year. His pragmatism and compassion, combined with his drive for results and deeply good heart make him a much-needed model for all public servants in these times.

Melanie Hammet, Mayor,
City of Pine Lake

DeKalb County – District 4

Accomplishments

- **Sponsored a food distribution event at E.L. Miller Elementary School for over 600 families**
- **Sponsored a food distribution event at Victory for the World Church for over 1000 families**
- **Sponsored a food distribution event at Fantastic Freedom Middle School for over 300 families**
- **As Chair of the Small Business Sub Committee of the COVID-19 Strategic Task Force, we recommended the establishment of a \$15 million loan fund and other support programs for DeKalb County's small businesses**
- **Hosted an Inspiration and Healing event for the citizens of DeKalb County**

The individual and collective suffering that this pandemic has induced has certainly affected me. I regard mitigating the suffering to the extent possible as our most solemn responsibility as leaders. Thankfully, the Coronavirus Aid Relief Economic Security (CARES) Act funds that we received from the federal government have been instrumental in helping us to mitigate suffering without having to make drastic choices.

I commend CEO Thurmond for how he has prioritized DeKalb County's \$125 million allocation, which included direct allocations to our municipalities. I also appreciate the fact that he set aside money for members of the Board of Commissioners to allocate at our discretion, amounting to about \$1.4 million for each BOC member.

I decided to focus on the basics by concentrating a significant portion of my funds on mitigating food insecurity and housing insecurity. To this end, my office identified 23 nonprofit agencies throughout District 4 and DeKalb County that are already engaged in these efforts. I am so grateful for the work that these organizations are doing to mitigate the suffering of our people.

**Antioch A.M.E.
Community Development
Corp. Inc.**

**Atlanta Community Food
Bank**

Atlanta Legal Aid Society

**Big Brothers, Big Sisters
DeKalb County**

**Clarkston Community
Center**

**DeKalb Chapter 100
Black Men of America**

**DeKalb County Board of
Health**

**First African Community
Development Corp.**

**Friends of Disabled
Adults & Children**

**International Rescue
Committee**

**K.D. Moore Community
Development Corp.**

**Latin American
Association**

**Oakhurst Medical
Centers**

Our House Inc.

Positive Growth Inc.

**Potter's House
Community Development
Center Inc.**

Respectful Ways

Scottdale Early Learning

Sheltering Arms

**Side by Side Brain Injury
Clubhouse**

**St. Vincent de Paul
Georgia Inc.**

Wade Walker Park YMCA

WorkSource DeKalb



The last of three Food Drives held at different locations throughout District 4. Pictured: Fantastic Freedom Middle School.

I want to thank all of DeKalb County's department heads and employees who have continued to deliver essential services amid this crisis. All these departments report to our Chief Operating Officer Zach Williams, who has done an outstanding job.

I would particularly like to thank our Chief Innovation and Information Officer, John Matelski, and his team for adapting to changing conditions and working so hard to keep our systems functioning properly. I also want to thank DCTV Director Diamond Lewis and her team for working so hard and keeping us on the airwaves. I must thank the BOC Central Staff members, who lost the Chief of Staff just before the onset of this pandemic, for stepping up and continuing to provide professional support to the BOC members.

We also owe a special word of thanks to our Public Health Director, Dr. Sandra Elizabeth Ford, for her steady leadership throughout this crisis. I cannot begin to imagine what it was like for her and her team, especially in the early days, when people were uncertain and frankly scared. Dr. Ford's presence and guidance were indeed comforting for all of us.

Most of all, I want to thank the citizens of DeKalb County for their resilience. My heart goes out to all of those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19. I empathize with the owners whose businesses have suffered or were forced to close due to COVID-19. The magnitude of the suffering to varying degrees has been tough on all of us.

Thankfully, the distribution of an effective vaccine appears to be at hand, but the vaccine is not in wide distribution yet. We cannot let our guards down. Let's continue to be vigilant. As I have said at the start of every Board of Commissioners business meeting since this crisis began, we will get through this together.