I wanted to give everyone a brief update on where we are with a number of issues arising from our response to the coronavirus. I will continue to try and give updates every few days, or as news comes out, to keep you informed. As everyone knows, this continues to be a rapidly changing situation, so both keeping up with developments, as well as understanding how they impact us, the people we support and our employees, is a constant challenge. But we will do our best!

First the good news—we still do not have any employee, or any person we serve, who has had a positive diagnosis of COVID 19. Thank you to everyone for your diligence in keeping safe and staying healthy. Also, thank you for your diligence in reporting sickness or possible exposures to people who have tested positive or who have symptoms. Please continue to do this, as this is the best way to keep the people we support and your fellow employees safe and healthy. As I noted in my last email, we are addressing each case individually, based on the individual circumstances and in accordance with CDC, DOH and OPWDD guidelines.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): As I think everyone has heard, hospitals, nursing homes and other health care providers, including organizations like ours, are struggling to get enough gloves, masks, gowns and shields to safely equip people who are dealing with individuals who are contagious. We are working with other providers, our provider associations, the county emergency operations center and our vendors to get as much equipment as we can. We are looking to have enough surgical masks so that everyone working at a residence can have one, if they wish. If we have any cases of a possible exposure, we may require that everyone wear masks. We are also looking at building a supply of the “home-made” masks—while these do not provide the same level of protection as the N95 masks, they will provide some protection. We will be distributing these to the houses as soon as we have them, along with a guide for their effective use.

Screening measures: We are planning to increase the “start of the shift” screening of employees at all of our residential sites to include taking the employees’ temperature at each site. We just got enough thermometers so we can do this. This will be the same screening that we have been doing at PRI, where all visitors and employees are being screened by answering questions and having their temperature taken.

Visits and outings—yesterday afternoon OPWDD issued an order directing that individuals living in our IRAs should not go out of their home to visit with family or others for the duration of the emergency. If individuals do leave for family visits, family members must be prepared to keep their family member home with them for the duration of the coronavirus emergency. We are reaching out to the families we know who have frequent visits to explain this policy. We are also looking at using facetime or other technology to help people stay in touch with their family members while this ban is in place. For outings, providers are directed to place “reasonable restrictions” on outings, even if specific outings are in someone’s Life Plan or staff action plan. Providers do have the discretion to allow residents to leave the house to engage in “low risk community settings.” We are looking at using Maple Ridge and/or Princetown as low risk sites where people could go to shoot baskets or engage in other activities where we can maintain the recommended social distance. We have
done extensive cleaning at these sites (and we can clean extensively after every use), and we can control the numbers of people who go to assure that the setting is low risk. People with questions about this can check with your Residential Director, Vicki or Sue.

Matilda’s Law—In Governor Cuomo’s announcements at the end of last week he spoke of “Matilda’s Law” (named for his mother), a set of measures that would apply to older New Yorkers (age 70+) and to people with higher risk with COVID 19. We started trying to comply with this, only to find out that this isn’t actually a law, and in fact there are no written requirements of any kind imposing the restrictions that Governor Cuomo was suggesting when he discussed “Matilda’s Law”. So, my apologies to our workers who are over 70, who were called at my direction who we thought had to stay home only to find out that that is not required (at least not yet!). If these guide lines become part of a law or an Executive Order, we will let you know.

Pine Ridge update—PRI continues to operate at a tremendous pace, packaging pipettes for VistaLabs at more than three times the usual volume. Our contact at VistaLabs sent us an email with a video from the news show “60 Minutes” showing a California laboratory using the pipettes that we pack. Congratulations to Nathan, Greg, Josh and all the team at PRI for meeting this incredibly important need.

Last reminder: Friday is payday—checks will be available for pick up at State Street between 8am and 5pm on Friday. Please let Jane Canale know (688-8269, or janec@sarcny.org) if you would like your paycheck delivered to your worksite. Otherwise it will be mailed to your home.

Again, I thank everyone for your incredible commitment to the people we support and to our mission. Every part of the agency has gone above and beyond their normal duties to help us respond to this crisis, and everyone should be very proud of the job they have done and the supports and services we are providing. Stay healthy!