



April 2 , 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I know this pandemic has dramatically affected all of our lives and led to a great deal of anxiety. I'm feeling it, too. None of us have ever lived through anything like this and, God willing, we never will again. I hope this email will answer many of your questions and give you and your family some peace of mind in these unsettling times.

First, I want you to understand that I am as on top of this situation as anyone could possibly be. Our handling of this crisis to date has been praised and emulated across the country. But, as this crisis changes daily, so must IBEW Local 98.

My plan up to this point in time was for IBEW Local 98 and the Philadelphia Building Trades to keep working to the greatest degree possible while keeping all of our members as safe as possible. Our strategy has been very successful and will continue to be employed going forward. By being a critical player in the waiver process for specific projects, being in the middle of the successful negotiations for the Federal Stimulus package #3, and staying in constant communications with Governor Wolf and Mayor Kenney, we have been working since the outbreak began and are well positioned to survive this terrible time and bounce back quickly when feasible.

Speaking of the Stimulus, we are currently in discussions with our lobbyists, Senators and Congressional Representatives - especially our friends Brendan Boyle, Donald Norcross and Madeleine Dean - on the Federal Stimulus Bill #4 and are focusing on badly-needed investments in the nation's infrastructure and the inclusion of crucial healthcare, COBRA and pension protections for all workers.

Compare our situation in Philadelphia's construction industry to what many other cities did. Several weeks ago, when COVID-19 really started to explode, many major cities immediately shut down their construction industries, whereas, as a result of our efforts, many of our members were able to continue working safely on many projects and earn good money to help weather the next few weeks. We're also now well-positioned to get back to work quickly and efficiently when this crisis ends. And it will. **I PROMISE YOU IT WILL.**

But it's become increasingly apparent to me that the risks of trying to work through this pandemic right now outweigh the benefits. Governor Wolf recently declared Pennsylvania a Disaster Area. On April 1st, he extended the mandatory "Stay At Home" order to all Pennsylvania counties. When the President of the United States recently said "[t]he next few weeks are going to be very, very difficult", you know that's a game-changer for everyone.

For the past several weeks, Philadelphia was fortunate to be in somewhat of a COVID-19 bubble, but the bubble just burst. The Trades now have several members who have tested positive for the virus. Yesterday, in partnership with all other Building Trades leaders, we made the difficult but necessary decision to shut down some large construction projects in the Greater Philadelphia region for the next two weeks, beginning Monday, April 6th at 8 am and remaining in place until 12:01 am on Monday, April 20th. We're reserving the option of additional temporary closures, if needed.

Job sites where workers tested positive, are awaiting test results, or are not following the safety protocols established by the Building Trades, GBCA and CDC will constitute reasons for closure. There are many exceptions to the temporary shutdown, including hospitals, other "life-sustaining" projects and the service businesses that support them.

All of you have worked hard to maintain the lifestyle you enjoy. Although this shutdown will cause some temporary economic hardship for our members, our recent efforts will help you bridge the gap. Unemployment benefits have been extended and your 98 leadership team played a pivotal role in securing key provisions of the \$2 Trillion Federal Stimulus Bill #3. [CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION](#) on unemployment benefits.

For a limited time, many Americans will be able to withdraw money from tax-deferred accounts without penalties. Some rules on 401(k) loans will be relaxed, and some retirees can avoid so-called required minimum distribution, or RMD, rules that might have been difficult to handle for many.

**[CLICK HERE FOR](#)** a detailed explanation of a key amendment to the Local 98 Profit Sharing Plan to permit non-hardship distributions from a participant's account during the period from April 1, 2020 through July 31, 2020, subject to certain conditions. As a result of COVID-19, that period of time has now been extended by the Trustees to December 31, 2020. I want to thank President Brian Burrows, all Local 98 Trustees and Tara Chupka for moving this process through so quickly for the benefit of our members.

A few housekeeping updates. The Business Office at 1701 Spring Garden Street is now closed. However, the Business Office is still answering all phone calls, so please feel free to call 215-563-5592 with any questions you may have or if you are presently out of work. Should you need to speak to someone in person, we are asking all members to visit us at 1719 Spring Garden Street.

**[IMPORTANT: IF YOU'VE BEEN LAID OFF, CALL THE BUSINESS OFFICE!!](#)**

The Financial Office is operating on a limited schedule. Someone will be in the office on a daily basis from 8 am to 4 pm to answer any questions you may have. During this current situation, we are asking that all dues payments be made online. If you have not set up an electronic account yet and require assistance to do so, please email Christine Bott at [cbott@ibew98.org](mailto:cbott@ibew98.org).

Any member who wishes to speak to someone in person, please enter 1719 Spring Garden Street through the back doors (located in the parking lot) and proceed to the basement. Local 98 Business Agents, Member Services Representatives and Organizers are available Monday – Friday, 7 am to 5 pm to answer members' questions or direct them to someone who can help.

If you need to appear before the Executive Board for any reason during this time, please call the Business Office at 215-563-5592 or contact Tara Chupka at [tchupka@ibew98.org](mailto:tchupka@ibew98.org).

If for some reason you are not receiving emails from IBEW 98, please email Kelli Penrose at [kpenrose@ibew98.org](mailto:kpenrose@ibew98.org) and she will make sure your email address is listed in your member profile.

IBEW Local 98's Benefit Fund Office, managed by Frank M. Vaccaro & Associates, is now closed, but staffers are working remotely and will answer all members messages in a timely fashion. Call them at 215-599-6436. If you have a specific concern and feel as though you can't get an answer or require immediate help, please contact Tara Chupka at [tchupka@ibew98.org](mailto:tchupka@ibew98.org) and she will work on getting someone from Vaccaro to get back to you ASAP.

Although IBEW 98 Apprentice Training is closed to Apprentices at this, we are currently processing online training options until things return to normal. If you have any questions or concerns, please call them at [215-567-6405](tel:215-567-6405).

For those who have accounts with Tru-Mark Financial, please be aware that they have instituted changes to help all customers cope with the financial challenges presented by the pandemic. [CLICK HERE FOR MORE DETAILS.](#)

These scary times can be very unsettling for many people, especially those with mental health and substance abuse issues. Emotional and psychological stress are more prevalent in turbulent times such as this. Isolation, boredom, and unhealthy coping mechanisms can all contribute to depression and/or the increase of substance use and abuse.

**If you feel like you need to talk to a professional regarding anxiety, depression, substance abuse issues, or just overall life stressors, please contact Local 98's Behavioral Health Professional Chris Scheiblein, at 267-738-5200 or email Chris at [cscheiblein@ibew98.org](mailto:cscheiblein@ibew98.org).**

Chris has the ability to do short-term counseling, assessments, and referrals to behavioral health providers or inpatient facilities for longer term and more intensive treatments. Since this pandemic has worsened, most providers have the capabilities to utilize Tele-Health services remotely. This service allows providers and patients to connect through the internet, both audio and visual, to ensure individuals get the help they need. This permits members to start, or continue in therapy, through a virtual port without engaging in face to face contact.

If you are currently on a medication, please stay in close contact with your prescribing physician so there are no gaps in treatment, and so the lines of communication stay open. It is important to stay vigilant with this aspect of your overall health. Additionally, the majority of inpatient facilities have established more stringent screening processes for admissions, safe protocols for transportation, and advanced health and safety precautions within the facilities, to maintain a safe and clean treatment environment. Please be patient with the medical professionals. They're overwhelmed at the moment. *As previously mentioned, you'll soon be receiving detailed information on two Tele-Medicine programs created by Blue Cross and Thomas Jefferson University Hospital that will be available to all Local 98 members to help you better manage your health.*

In regards to safety, your Local 98 leadership team urges you to take the proper steps to guarantee that you and your families are in the best position to stay safe and healthy through this tumultuous time. Remember the basics:

- \* **Wash your hands often for at least 20 seconds**
- \* **Don't touch your face or make contact with others.**
- \* **Practice social distancing.**
- \* **If you feel at all unwell, stay home!**

The health and safety of you and your families is my priority. Local 98 has created an economy that no other union can match. We are extremely well-prepared and well-positioned financially to withstand this crisis. We have strong leadership and an even stronger membership. Our funds also remain strong. I should be able to confirm in the next two weeks a great new Collective Bargaining Agreement with NECA and a renegotiated healthcare agreement with Blue Cross that will continue to provide you and your families with the best healthcare safety net available.

We will survive this and emerge even stronger. I also believe the world will emerge a better place when this nightmare ends. And it will.

This is a time for serious people. Expect serious results from your union. If you have any questions or concerns, know that you can always e-mail me at [JJDoc@ibew98.org](mailto:JJDoc@ibew98.org).

Please say a prayer for all of us. Thank you.

Yours in solidarity,  
John J. Dougherty  
Business Manager