



# CITY OF SELMA

DARRIO MELTON  
MAYOR

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July 1, 2020

Dear Citizens of the Queen City,

I think many of you are just as frustrated as I am with the inaction of the Council during this global health crisis. At the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, I asked the Council to join me in declaring a State of Emergency in the City of Selma and mandate a curfew, but they failed to act. Thus, I took the only other option that remained; an executive order was made declaring a State of Emergency in the City while setting a curfew in place. Afterwards, I asked the Council to earmark \$1 million for COVID-19. After a month of ignoring this request, the Council finally voted to earmark \$1 million dollars for the novel virus. Meanwhile, the CARES Act afforded the City of Selma over \$841,000 for reimbursement of receipted expenses related to COVID-19.

In order to re-open City Hall to the public on July 7<sup>th</sup>, I signed and submitted a Purchase Order form on June 30<sup>th</sup> for personal protective equipment (PPE) to include 10,000 masks, 10 infrared thermometers, and 20 bottles of hand sanitizer, only to be rejected by the Council and the Finance Department. I was told by the Finance Department that no purchase could be made from COVID-19 funds unless President of the Council, Corey Bowie, signed off on the purchase. Here's the issue, outside of a legally convened council meeting with a quorum being present, President Bowie is considered to have no greater authority than a citizen of the City. Yet, the Finance Department contacted President Bowie and Pro Temp Angela Benjamin about a legal purchase being made by the elected mayor. It is not procedural for the Council to be contacted every time the mayor makes a purchase. Shortly after being denied the request to purchase PPE for City employees, citizens who need to access city buildings for business purposes, voters/staff at election precincts, and those less fortunate among us, I received an email from Pro Temp Benjamin stating that the Council has voted on a process in order to make purchases with the \$841,000 from the CARES Act and she went on to educate me on the new procedures. However, what was more disturbing than their denial was that the purchase order submitted was to come out of the earmarked \$1 million set aside for COVID-19 and not the reimbursement funds of \$841,000 that Pro Temp Benjamin's email referenced. I indeed believe that we should always maximize resources but here is the problem with her email, the City Clerk, the keeper of all City records, has provided me nothing in writing (Resolution/Ordinance) stating the Council voted to implement a procedure in which the City can only function when the part-time president of the Council, Corey Bowie, can be reached to sign off on a purchase. That is just unacceptable and simply shameful.

The Selma City Council's behavior with taxpayers' resources is not how typical governments function. What they did not tell me, although I quickly learned, is that on June 29<sup>th</sup>, they purchased and received 5,000 disposable masks for which they allocated 500 masks for each ward to distribute. It is my hope that the Council is not attempting to exploit this health crisis by using taxpayers' funds to score political points with voters. While they have chosen to give themselves 500 disposal masks for their individual wards, they have ignored City employees, citizens who may need to visit City facilities, staff/voters of election precincts, and those who may not be able

to afford a mask. Like many of you, I am wondering, if there are 2,000 plus citizens in each ward, how will they determine which 500 will receive disposable masks? Why not leave the 5,000 masks they ordered at City Hall to be used by those listed above? And like you, I cannot answer for the Council's intentions.

We as a city have been camped here long enough. It is time your voice is heard. The Council is attempting to hinder the opening of City Hall on July 7<sup>th</sup>. Please contact your Council member and ask them to give city employees and citizens the necessary supplies in order to increase access to your government during this pandemic. It is time to move on. The problem is simply that too many of our council members attempt to operate as mini-mayors. It is clear, they do not understand their statutory duties and that is dangerous. The Council has no legal authority over the day-to-day operations. It's time they stop playing with the lives of employees and citizens. You and I may not agree on every issue, but I think that we all agree that Selma and its great citizens deserve better.