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COUNTY EXECUTIVE JONATHAN DELAGRAVE'S 2020 STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS

Hello and welcome everyone to my sixth State of the County address.

I could not have imagined doing a State of the County speech by video in the midst of a pandemic that has caused so much difficulty, disruption, and heartbreak.

Many of us know residents and families who have been impacted by this devastating and dangerous COVID-19. Across Racine County, many of our businesses and workers are hurting.

As COVID-19 cases rise, we all need to continue to do our part to protect our fellow community members. And while many of our businesses have begun reopening, the work to rebuild our local economy and establish consumer confidence is only just beginning.

At Racine County, we have been working around the clock to respond to this outbreak and bring together communities for a common good.

As my T-shirt says, we are truly Resilient Racine County. I especially want to salute the County's first responders and essential employees. We owe them all a tremendous debt of gratitude, and I'm proud that proceeds from the 153 shirts we've sold so far will go toward those most impacted by the outbreak.

I'm also proud that even during a pandemic, the County is continuing to move forward in important ways for our taxpayers.

Today, we launched our "State Of The County" website that features several new tools to bring people closer to the government that serves them.

At racinecounty.com/StateOfTheCounty, residents have the ability to track – in real time – their investments into public safety, highways, parks and other county functions. You can also see – in real time – how our priorities like education attainment, mental health, and trauma-informed care training are moving forward.

And you can even order this very same Resilient Racine County T-shirt and help a good cause. It's all there at [racinecounty.com/StateOfTheCounty](https://www.racinecounty.com/StateOfTheCounty).

In addition, today we are introducing the inaugural State of the County Report. This 24-page report provides another snapshot into county government, county spending, and how we are innovating, impacting, and investing in our communities. We will be distributing this report to the County Board and other community partners, and it will be made available at county buildings.

But we think we can even be more transparent -- with the help of the County Board.

Open government is a cornerstone of our democracy and should remain that way no matter who is in charge or what direction the political winds are blowing. I want to raise the bar on transparency and be the most open government in the State of Wisconsin.

So today, I am calling on the Racine County Board to pass an ordinance that codifies this commitment to transparency into law. The Office of Corporation Counsel is in the process of drafting such an ordinance and I look forward to working with Chairman Roanhouse, Vice Chairman Kramer, and the full County Board to ensure this legislation makes it to my desk – and hopefully, this quarantine hair will be cut by then.

In addition to these new transparency measures, we've also moved forward on many other County initiatives.

Construction of the multipurpose stadium at the SC Johnson Community Sports Complex at Pritchard Park continues on schedule and on budget.

We continue to work in partnership with the County Board and State of Wisconsin to construct a new trauma-informed youth justice facility.

We have also recognized racial achievement gaps in our County, crunched the data and have set goals to boost household income, education and home ownership among minority populations.

Increasing internet connectivity throughout Racine County emerged as a goal of our Digital Counties initiative last year. But this year, during COVID-19, the disparities became even more glaring.

In collaboration with the Racine Unified School District, Gateway Technical College and e-Vergent, we're excited to move forward on a project that will help close this so-called "digital divide" and expand internet service to 25 additional access points, both east and west of I-94.

This internet expansion is just one of the many forward-thinking initiatives spearheaded by our department heads over the last two months. I want to thank the members of my cabinet for their incredible efforts to help our County adapt to this unprecedented time in our history.

I also want to thank our county elected leaders who have overcome tremendous challenges to ensure operations continue.

I particularly want to commend Sheriff Christopher Schmaling, who by being proactive reports that, at the time of this recording, no Racine County Jail inmates or corrections officers are known to have COVID-19. In addition, Chris and the Sheriff's Office have continued to keep our County safe while holding the fewest number of jail inmates in the last 25 years.

And I want to give a very special recognition to County Clerk Wendy Christensen and the entire Clerk's Office. Holding this spring's election has been one of the most challenging aspects of our COVID-19 response – but Wendy, her staff, municipal clerks, poll workers, Wisconsin National Guard members, Emergency Operations Center staff, volunteers and many others rose to the challenge. Thank you all!

Finally, I want to thank the Racine County Board. I've never taken for granted our working relationship, but I'm especially grateful for our partnership during this public health emergency, when it's essential we come together for our residents and businesses.

As we move forward in the coming weeks and months, there's no playbook for us to follow, no past example to guide us. We know the road ahead will not be an easy one.

But I will always bet on Racine County – on our residents, our businesses, our leaders.

While it's been a difficult year, we have also seen so many in our community rising to the occasion and helping our County persevere through crisis.

If we stick together – as one County -- I know we can emerge from this pandemic stronger than ever.

Thank you, and may God Bless our Resilient Racine County.