Hello -

In consideration of the March 12 announcements by Maryland Governor Hogan, Montgomery County Executive Elrich, and DC Mayor Bowser, A Wider Circle will be closed effective Saturday, March 14 - Sunday, March 29. There are no known cases of COVID-19 (coronavirus) that have impacted the Wider Circle community at this time, but the health and safety of our staff and those we serve is paramount.

As many of you know, we are typically open seven days/week because nobody is in poverty Monday - Friday, 9:00 - 5:00 or gets out of poverty on Sundays or holidays. Additionally, we know that at this time, many we serve will face extra challenges of reduced work hours, children out of school with no childcare, and more limited access to food and more. Our decision to close was a challenging one.

At the same time, because we typically have more than 250 people in our Silver Spring headquarters - and far more than that on many days - we need to take this action. We know that those who had appointments will have to reschedule them, volunteers will need to cancel and identify new days of service, and donors will need to wait longer to drop off donations or have pick-ups at their homes.

All of this is concerning at a high level, but we need to support our leaders who are trying to keep us safe and healthy, so this is something we do in full support of those whose responsibility it is to safeguard our health. Their job is not an easy one. During this time, we want to help flatten the curve of cases and we also want to ensure our staff of 70 is fully loved and supported.

During the weeks of closure, our team, both full-time and part-time, will be paid fully. Those of you who volunteer or donate here know how great they are and how much they give to the community, at large. And we seek to ensure their well being in every way.

Each team here has been thinking about how we can help our neighbors during this time. As an organization, we will seek to do as much remotely as possible. For example, we are:

- Reaching out to all clients who have appointments across any of our sites to inform them of the closure and to discuss any options for virtual support
- Identifying sites for food and meal support and sharing those resources with our clients
- Providing workforce development, housing, and other support services consultations virtually, as feasible
- Building a resource toolkit for our clients on topics ranging from how to apply for public benefits, health access points, and more

We recognize that this situation is changing rapidly. We will be in communication if we have to close our offices and services beyond the scheduled date.
Please refer to the resources below for updates and information as well.

- Maryland Department of Health COVID-19 Resources
- DC Department of Health COVID-19 Resources
- Maryland Department of Health COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions
- COVID-19 Information for Older Adults

Also, please remember these important tips as we all seek to slow the spread of COVID-19.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol if soap and water are not available
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, your sleeve, or your elbow
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using standard cleaning practices
- Avoid touching your face
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home if you are sick, except when seeking medical care

We will be ready to offer our complete complement of services upon our return. If you undertake spring cleaning while at home and collect wonderful donations for those we serve, we ask that you do not drop off donations until we reopen, as there will not be staff members present. When we reopen, we will look to make up for lost time and will schedule a higher-than-usual number of clients. We will need more volunteers, so please stay tuned for updates on volunteer opportunities in coming weeks.

Thank you for your concern and your understanding during this challenging time. We will continue to keep you updated as needed. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Wishing you all health and safety,

Mark Bergel, Ph.D.
Founder, President & CEO
www.awidercircle.org