



May 28, 2020

Zakiya Smith Ellis, Secretary of Higher Education Office  
of the Secretary of Higher Education  
1 John Fitch Plaza, 10<sup>th</sup>  
Floor P.O. Box 542  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0542 Dear

Madam Secretary:

On behalf of Warren Community College, I am appealing to you for an exception to the gubernatorial ban on face-to-face instruction for our Firefighter I Program at WCCC's Fire Academy.

During the first two months of closure, we have provided continuous, weekly remote classes via the Zoom platform that have kept our Firefighter I Program classes on schedule for the lecture portion of the curriculum. However, our recruits are significantly behind schedule in regards to the hands-on practical skills component that is required by the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety. This outdoor hands-on training usually begins in early- to mid-April.

First and foremost, we can provide a safe environment with ample social distancing, protection and sanitizing to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our instructors and recruits while on Fire Academy grounds. Second, this program requires significant skills training in order to achieve an acceptable competency level in firefighting skills and for New Jersey State certification requirements.

We do not make this request lightly and every precaution will be taken to protect our recruits. Their safety and wellbeing is paramount. Our outdoor training grounds are comprised of four separate training areas, which can accommodate up to eight recruits at a time. The Firefighter I practical skills training will be conducted in an open-air setting where students will be naturally distanced from each other as they conduct separate tasks. Additionally, recruits can maintain a distance of 8 – 15 feet from each other well beyond the CDC standard set for health safety.

Your letter of March 17, 2020 established conditions necessary to review an appeal of the Executive Order. Below, we first affirm the need for outdoor face-to-face skills instruction. This is followed by the protocols to be enforced as we provide a safe and sanitary training environment.

As mentioned above, the Firefighter I Program requires a component of hands-on training as per the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety. Initially, students received instruction in lecture format, which converted to online learning via the Zoom platform on April 2, 2020.

While our instructors have now completed the lecture component of the program, the recruits must complete and pass the hands-on practical skills training that is mandated in order to be certified by the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety.



Warren County has a significant number of firefighters that are not able to respond to alarms because of COVID-19 mandatory self-isolation issues such as age or pre-existing conditions. Once the recruits complete this mandated hands-on skills training and become certified, they will be able to close this gap and meet the demand of the front line essential first responders needed in Warren County.

These are highly unusual times and we recognize the significant need for disciplined precautions. Attached are the safety and cleaning/sanitizing protocols that will be in place at WCCC's Fire Academy if we are permitted to provide outside practical skills training on our training grounds. These guidelines will be exercised to ensure all recruits and staff are safe. Any additional suggestions, guidelines, or measures your office would deem important would be implemented in order to reactivate our Firefighter I Program. Please feel free to reach out to me for any questions at my office, 908-689-7618.

We value your consideration on this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'William J. Austin'.

William J. Austin  
President



It is the goal of Warren Community College to provide a safe and healthy space for our students, instructors, and staff. We will be adding additional measures to our outdoor Firefighter I training policies and procedures in order to minimize the risk of transmission of any illness. Additional measures include:

The Fire Academy Coordinator, Joseph Fox, Sr., or Deputy Coordinator, Jeffrey Firling, will monitor and enforce this plan.

We will limit the number of recruits permitted in the training area at any given time to a maximum of eight recruits per outdoor training space. Staff will arrange recruits in the outdoor workspaces to minimize close contact. No activities will take place without these social distancing measures in place.

Recruits and staff will be instructed to follow proper respiratory hygiene, including:

- Wearing masks at all times.
- Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve, not hands. ○ Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Students will be required to wash their hands frequently. Handwashing will be required upon entry to the facility (if needed) and at the conclusion of working before exiting the facility. Directions for proper handwashing are displayed at all sinks, clearly following the general rule of washing for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing or sneezing. They will use alcohol-based sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- All handwashing stations will be clean and functional, with soap, paper towels, tissues, and trashcans.

In training areas, each recruit will use their own personal protective equipment.

Disinfectant will be located at all training areas. All tools and equipment will be disinfected both prior to and immediately after use.

Temperature checks of persons will be taken of all recruits prior to skills training using the Berrcom non-contact infrared thermometer.

Anyone who is not feeling well will be sent home. Anyone who believes they are not fully well will be sent home. If anyone enters the skills training and displays symptoms of illness, they will be requested (demanded) to leave. If they need to stay at the Academy to wait for a ride, they will be required to sit outside of the skills training area until their transportation arrives.

If someone displays symptoms and are asked to leave, all recruits working in that area will be asked to leave that workspace.

As mentioned, all skills training will take place outdoors.



Instructors and recruits will be required to adhere to the following policies. These policies will be provided to all students, instructors, and staff; and instructors will cover these policies with their students. Additionally, these policies will also be on display inside and outside of the Academy.

The outdoor training center will be monitored at all times by the Fire Academy Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator to ensure policies are being adhered to.

No open water glasses will be permitted. No food permitted.

All hand tools and equipment must be sanitized both prior to and after use.

Wear protective face mask at all times

If you are not feeling well please stay home and get better. Our goal is to minimize any transmission of illness. Your help is greatly appreciated.

All accessing the facility will follow guidance from the CDC, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>. These guidelines, as well as the “Stop the Spread of Germs” poster, at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html>, are posted throughout the college property.