

## **Office of the Secretary of Higher Education releases Graduation Ceremony Guidance**

The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) today published graduation guidance for institutions of higher education that outline considerations modified in-person graduation ceremonies beginning on July 6, 2020. The guidance includes requirements that ceremonies be held outdoors, adhere to social distancing protocols, and restrict capacity to protect the health and safety of students and families celebrating these milestones amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

“This year’s graduating class has embraced various challenges and triumphed in the face of a global public health emergency. We know it has been a long journey, and through our guidance published today, we are looking forward to working with institutions of higher education to give our students a sendoff that recognizes their scholastic achievements,” **said Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis, Secretary of Higher Education.** “We cannot put New Jersey back on the road to progress and prosperity without our students. We are excited to see what the Class of 2020 will accomplish.”

The guidance is available on [OSHE’s website](#).

Institutions of higher education should plan for multiple scenarios in order to select the ceremony type that best fits institutional needs and context and complies with the required level of social distancing restrictions in place at the time of the event. Virtual and drive-in/drive-through ceremonies can be held prior to July 6, 2020. The decision regarding commencement ultimately belongs to each individual institution. Institutions should also keep local officials, including emergency management, law enforcement, and health officials, informed of ceremony plans.

All institutions that plan to hold modified in-person ceremonies must certify to OSHE, via an online submission form that will be made available starting June 5, 2020 on <https://covid19.nj.gov/>, that the planned ceremony will comply with applicable requirements for gatherings, including those addressing social distancing. The form must be submitted no later than seven days prior to the scheduled date of the ceremony.

The guidance includes the following requirements for commencement ceremonies:

- Modified in-person ceremonies may only occur on or after July 6, 2020;
- Institutions must adhere to the relevant capacity limitation on in-person gatherings in place at the time of the ceremony (this may require institutions to hold multiple

ceremonies over the course of several days to ensure capacity restrictions are not exceeded); and

- Institutions must determine the minimum number of staff and faculty necessary to facilitate commencement ceremonies and adjust attendance requirements accordingly.

Institutions should stay informed of state and local rules and guidance, as the social distancing requirements in the guidance are subject to change. Institutions must further be proactive and clear in communicating guidelines and directions to those in attendance and consider sharing the same with students and families in advance of the commencement ceremonies.