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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS COUNTY OF MONO

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Shannon Kendall, Clerk of the Board

Via Electronic Mail

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Office of the Governor
California State Capital
Sacramento, CA. 95814

May 8, 2020

Dear Governor Newsom,

Thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented health crisis. Because of your decisive action, California crushed the anticipated COVID-19 curve and avoided a surge of hospital patients that could have devastated small rural healthcare systems like ours in Mono County. In diverse and dispersed counties from Los Angeles to Alpine, Californians are taking good care of each other, making sacrifices, and standing together in the face of this pandemic.

As we continue down the path to recovery and reopening, Mono and other counties are working with the state to follow the Roadmap to Recovery. We appreciate your recognition that different regions of the state need to take different routes to get there, and we are writing today to request further partnership and consideration for the well-being of our rural and remote, tourism-dependent communities.

Our specific ask is that the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) allow very minor exceptions of/refinements to two of the readiness criteria: (1) number of cases; and (2) testing capacity, where those refinements are supported by the local health officer, data and science. As discussed in more detail below, we have developed a robust system for contact tracing, thereby uncovering new cases even after symptoms have passed, but our small population (less than 15,000 countywide) makes the population-based criteria (e.g., no more than 1 case per 10,000 residents) extremely hard to achieve. We hope that this letter provides insight into the unique challenges and opportunities of our iconic frontier region, a place that is a long drive from Sacramento but close to the hearts of so many of our state's residents.

Stage 2 Variance Readiness Criteria

Counties like Mono eagerly awaited new guidance from the CDPH this week outlining the parameters to allow a county to accelerate through Stage 2 of the California Roadmap to Recovery. Even though by most metrics Mono County is stable, with our small population, sporadic cases identified through robust contact tracing affect our per capita rate, such that we may not meet CDPH readiness criteria for some time.

The disease in Mono County has been stable, with the situation quiet, since the Stay At Home Order was executed. After an alarming cluster of severe illness in March, we have had no COVID-19 hospitalizations during April or May. The Mono County Health Officer, with the support of the Board of Supervisors and Mammoth Hospital, is attesting to our readiness to move fully into Stage 2, in concert with our neighboring counties, Inyo and Alpine, based on the following:

- Our Public Health department has exceptional contact tracing capacity - SARS CoV-2 testing is readily available at Mammoth Hospital in southern Mono County, at Toiyabe Indian Health Project in northern Mono County, and in Bishop (in Inyo County), such that all county residents have access within 30 to 45 minutes of driving.
- Mammoth Hospital has invested great effort into ensuring adequate surge capacity (greater than 100% of licensed beds), worker safety and preparedness, and the hospital is now ready, quiet and waiting.
- Our Unified Command response has created a COVID-19 Nurse Hotline to provide clinical guidance to anyone who is ill, and our nurses facilitate testing for anyone with symptoms remotely suggestive of COVID-19, or who has had exposure to possible cases.
- We have a robust Community Support branch of our response team that provides services to people staying at home and to people experiencing food insecurity. This branch has the capacity to provide broad clinical and material support to people at home, including people in isolation and quarantine, while still taking preventative and cautious measures for the safety of workers.
- Mono County and the Town of Mammoth Lakes have the capacity and mechanisms in place to house people at risk, including out-of-home isolation and quarantine.

In short, we have worked very hard to respond to COVID-19 and feel we are as ready as any community can be to move into the next phase of life with the pandemic.

Our Seasonal Businesses Need to Reopen and Prepare for Summer

The ability to progress through Stage 2 variances this month is critical for the future of our communities. Mono County—home to Mono Lake, Bodie State Park, Mammoth Mountain, and other iconic landmarks and landscapes—is a beloved destination for thousands of Californians looking for peace and connection to nature (something that they'll need more than ever when travel restrictions are lifted). Our communities have built an economy based on welcoming visitors and vacation homeowners, and these small businesses are on the verge of collapse. We must be able to prepare for and look forward to summer tourism. Memorial Day Weekend is the traditional start of the season, and is approaching quickly. The loss of a summer season, or even a portion of it, will be fatal to the majority of Mono County's businesses. For our communities, being set back two or three weeks because of per-capita readiness calculations means losing everything. We could be wiped off the map entirely.

The mountains are calling, and our visitors are coming, whether we're open or not. Already, public land managers from the US Forest Service and BLM have noted an uptick in dispersed camping around our communities. Many of our non-resident property owners yearn to return to their vacation homes and cabins. Trans-Sierra highways such as 89 and 108 are opening. We need to be able to manage the visitation that is happening now and prepare for the bigger numbers of vacationers that we can expect when Yosemite National Park and other attractions open. Please help us be good stewards of these special places and natural resources through provision of guest services.

We realize that all of this is predicated upon Mono County and California continuing to win the fight against coronavirus, and that decisions are driven by data and science. There is evidence that a small county like ours can meet this challenge, with support from the state. We're all in it together, and we ask that you consider our request and perspective.

In health and community,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stacy Corless". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Stacy Corless
Chair, Mono County Board of Supervisors

Cc: Town Council of the Town of Mammoth Lakes
Inyo County Board of Supervisors
Alpine County Board of Supervisors
City of Bishop City Council
Senator Borgeas
Assemblymember Bigelow
Rural County Representatives of California
California State Association of Counties