



ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

August 6, 2020

Dear Governor Dunleavy,

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic in Alaska, your administration showed decisive leadership and issued clear health mandates that helped to “flatten the curve.” As a result, Alaska saw extremely low rates of COVID-19. However, as the State has relaxed protective measures and replaced the well-defined, multi-phased reopening with general advisory recommendations, we have lost that advantage and Alaska has witnessed a dramatic surge in positive COVID-19 cases for several weeks.

During a House Health & Social Services Committee hearing on July 28, Alaska physicians, hospital administrators, and epidemiologists issued stark warnings about the current trajectory of the pandemic in Alaska — that what we are doing now to control the outbreak is not working, and is instead rapidly worsening. If current trends continue, and they almost certainly will, experts predict Alaska’s hospital capacity will be overwhelmed by mid-September; just a few short weeks away. This means we could witness unnecessary harm and loss of life of Alaskans as a result of this unpredictable virus, as models used to predict increases in cases point to an increase in community spread, followed by hospital admissions, ICU admissions, and then deaths.

We heard resoundingly in testimony that day that available hospital beds and ventilators are the wrong metrics to base COVID-19 policy decisions on, as they are a lagging indicator that could be delayed by as much as 1-2 weeks. At the time of the hearing, hospitalizations had climbed over 60% over the prior week. Additionally, these hospital resources require staff with specialized skills to utilize them. Hospitals without adequate staffing of doctors, nurses, and specialized support staff would be akin to having airplanes full of important cargo without pilots to fly them.

Choosing between a healthy economy and a healthy population is a false dichotomy. We cannot have one without the other. Dr. Robert Onders, Medical Director of ANTHC and Acting ANMC Hospital Administrator, said that as evidenced in the lower 48, patchwork regulations do not work well in controlling spread of COVID-19. Instead, he and other Alaska experts called for statewide mandates and policies to protect the public’s health.

Alaska is at a critical time to change course. We must work to mitigate high-risk activities that pose enhanced risk of COVID-19 spread. We need your bold leadership to enact a statewide comprehensive and consistent COVID-19 mitigation plan, and soon. We urge you to develop a data-driven framework to guide enactment of protective measures that address key drivers of transmission in Alaska. These could include:

- Limit the size of group gatherings.
- Mandate capacity restrictions, physical distancing, and facial covering use in public settings where proper physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- Establish and publish specific metrics and action levels based on growth of the epidemic that governments and communities can use to objectively evaluate local conditions and to consider

responses. *This would also make transparent what measures the State of Alaska is using to make decisions.*

- Consider conditions, with related metrics, under which a community may elect to opt-out of a statewide protective measure, but at least establish a statewide minimum for high-risk activities.

While we appreciate the wide spectrum of unique needs across our State, and the intent to tailor policies to specific populations, at the end of this public health emergency we will be measured by our outcomes and not the intent. Ultimately, Alaska’s public health and economic outcomes will depend on whether clear and decisive action was taken by the State during this difficult time.

Thank you for the work you do on behalf of Alaskans.

Sincerely,



Representative Tiffany Zulkosky



Representative Matt Claman



Representative Bryce Edgmon



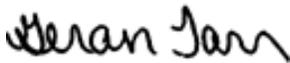
Representative Sara Hannan



Representative Andy Josephson



Representative Dan Ortiz



Representative Geran Tarr



Representative Harriet Drummond



Representative Zach Fields



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Representative Ivy Spohnholz

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