



November 18, 2020

**Honorable Governor Kate Brown
900 Court St. NE, Room 254
Salem, OR 97301**

Dear Governor Brown,

We appreciate and understand the challenges you have faced as our Governor during this challenging time in Oregon. We have seen improvements in the response to COVID-19 and the executive decisions you have made that have slowed the spread of the virus. In our roles as state legislators, county commissioners and judges, and regional leaders, we've encouraged every effort available to do the same.

A one-size-fits-all approach to shutting down the state was logical and appropriate in March when the onset of this pandemic was new and was unknown. Over time, we have learned, adapted, adjusted and improved. Keeping counties and regions in a Phase II for an indefinite period of time is a one size fits all approach that does not work any longer.

It is time to re-evaluate the metrics and the ever-changing goal posts related to slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our rural, semi-rural, eastern and frontier communities. We have shut down for months, we have met the metrics required, we have followed the goal posts as they've moved, we have adhered to the rules, we have slowed the spread—and yet, our counties, communities, small businesses, K-12 schools, childcare and colleges, health departments and more, sit in a stale and stagnant state without forward progress. We have done and continue to do all that is within our capacity to slow the spread of COVID-19, and now, some of our border counties are being directly affected by decisions and actions from outside our state over which we have no control.

This is not a sustainable position for our communities.

Our COVID-19 cases will ebb and flow over the next several months just as they have over the last several weeks. This metric is not a reliable indicator of the situation. The metric that is most important to reconsider at this time is the original goal of ensuring there is adequate hospital capacity and not overwhelming our medical facilities. We have met this goal from the onset and continue to meet this goal. This must be the benchmark for future conversations on how we learn to live with COVID-19.

There is still much we don't know about COVID-19, but what we do know is the continued closure and limitations under these guidelines disproportionately impact women, single-parent homes, rural communities and small businesses. Our students are struggling in their education

as well as their mental and emotional fitness, families have been stressed to the maximum, and decade-old businesses that are the lifeblood of our Oregon communities have closed for good.

Over the past few weeks, we have safely met with school superintendents, the ODE Director, county sheriffs, county public health authorities and agency representatives to discuss how we move forward.

We must make significant changes to the way our systems are being managed going forward. It is not realistic or sustainable to continue in Phase I or II, as currently described, for our districts, counties and communities wherein.

We propose four areas for change:

- 1. Restaurants and bars:** Our hospitality industry, restaurants and bars must be able to stay open. The data shared by OHA does not show any indication that our restaurants and bars are the cause of increased cases. In addition, our hospitality industry is responsible for employing tens of thousands of Oregonians and keeping our already-fragile economy moving. Our restaurants and bars need to be able to extend their hours beyond the arbitrary closing time of 10:00pm and need to safely expand their indoor occupancy especially as we head into the holiday season and winter when indoor restaurants, lodging and tourism activity will grow. We are at risk for nearly 40% of our remaining businesses closing in the next six months if we do not allow for reasonable expansion of these services and industries.
- 2. Schools:** Our schools need to be allowed to fully re-open for in-classroom learning, and our students need to be allowed to participate in extracurricular activities. All teachers, students, staff, and volunteers that want to return to in-person learning should be able to do so in a safe manner. All teachers, students, staff, and volunteers that desire to continue CDL should be able to do so. If it is safe for college athletes to return to sports, assuredly it is safe for high school students. Parents need to be able to return to work, and our students and teachers need the stability of the classroom.
- 3. State Agencies:** We need to reopen our state agencies at all levels, including and specifically DMVs, across the state. We would argue, and assume you would agree, that our state agencies and state employees are essential. These agencies are funded with public dollars and our public needs full access to these essential services.
- 4. Religious institutions:** Release our churches and places of worship. While outliers will exist as the exception, most churches and places of worship will be and have been more than scrupulous in protecting their congregations from harm from COVID-19. Give pastors, religious leaders and governing boards the latitude to exercise their best judgement for safety.

We have been living with extreme difficulty with COVID-19 for over eight months and have taken the necessary precautions during this time, but we have another six, 12, 18 months, or longer to go as we continue to understand this pandemic. Further shutdowns are not

sustainable. We must adapt our Phases to allow for therapeutic remedies that appear to be on the horizon.

At this juncture, by not allowing our kids to go to school, our parents and families to work, our agencies to open for services, and our small businesses to reopen for business, we are failing our state and devastating the lives of tens of thousands of Oregonians. Our rural communities are being left out and left behind. As leaders, we are failing our constituents and the future of our state's survival is at risk.

We urge you to consider a more realistic approach and set a course of action that allows for freedoms, safety, and sustainability to work in conjunction with one another. In order to accomplish this, we must empower our local public health authorities to work with the local elected leadership, both of whom fully know local situations, to work together and in partnership with the OHA to move forward with what can become a regional version of Phase II-A and Phase II-B.

We are having these conversations now, and more importantly, we are taking the necessary steps to develop these plans so we can act and move our unique regions forward towards a sustainable, viable future. Something has to change, and we're prepared to move ahead.

We have a simple ask.

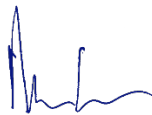
As the leaders chosen by Oregonians to represent their best interests and be their advocates, throughout and across our beautiful state, we would ask that the Governor and Governor's office participate in these meetings and work with us, assess the proposals and plans we put forward, and consider the options we will be recommending for your consideration and approval.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,



Senator Lynn Findley
Senate District 30



Rep. Mark Owens
House District 60



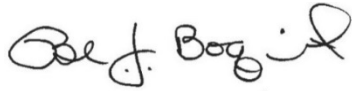
Senator Bill Hansell
Senate District 29



Senator Kim Thatcher
Senate District 13



Senator Fred Girod
Senate District 9



Senator Brian Boquist
Senate District 12



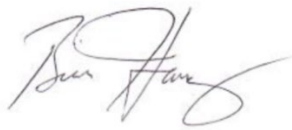
Senator Chuck Thomsen
Senate District 26



Rep. Greg Barretto
House District 58



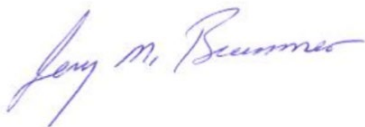
Rep. Raquel Moore-Green
House District 19



Bill Harvey
Baker County Commissioner



Mark Bennett
Baker County Commissioner



Jerry Brummer
Crook County Commissioner



Rep. Shelly Boshart-Davis
House District 15



Rep. Mike Nearman
House District 23



Rep. Bill Post
House District 25



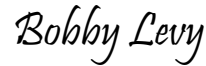
Rep. Rick Lewis
House District 18



Rep. Carl Wilson
House District 3



Rep. Elect and
Commissioner Lily Morgan
House District 3



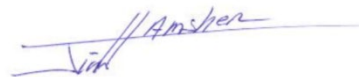
Rep-Elect Bobby Levy
House District 58



Patti Adair
Deschutes County Commissioner



Tony DeBone
Deschutes County Commissioner



Jim Hamsher
Grant County Commissioner

Sam Palmer
Grant County Commissioner

Pete Runnels
Harney County Commissioner

Patty Dorroh
Harney County Commissioner

Kristen Shelman
Harney County Commissioner

Mae Huston
Jefferson County Commissioner

Donnie Boyd
Klamath County Commissioner

Derrick DeGroot
Klamath County Commissioner

Kelley Minty Morris
Klamath County Commissioner

Mark Albertson
Lake County Commissioner

Brad Winters
Lake County Commissioner

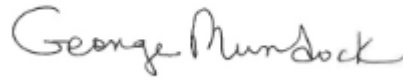
James Williams
Lake County Commissioner

Donald Hodge
Malheur County Commissioner

Larry Wilson
Malheur County Commissioner



Dan Joyce
Malheur County Commissioner



George Murdock
Umatilla County Commissioner



Melissa Lindsay
Morrow County Commissioner



John Shafer
Umatilla County Commissioner



Don Russell
Morrow County Commissioner



Paul Anderes
Union County Commissioner



Jim Doherty
Morrow County Commissioner



Matt Scarfo
Union County Commissioner



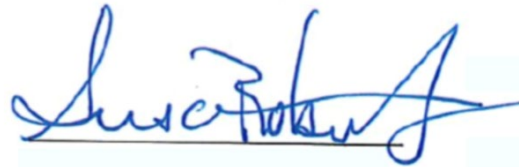
Todd Nash
Polk County Commissioner



Donna Beverage
Union County Commissioner



Craig Pope
Polk County Commissioner



Susan Roberts
Wallowa County Commissioner



Bill Elfering
Umatilla County Commissioner



Mary Starrett
Yamhill County Commissioner