

ALASKA



STATE LEGISLATURE

October 27th, 2020

The Honorable Michael Dunleavy
State of Alaska
PO Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

Governor Dunleavy,

We are writing today in support of coming together to extend the public health emergency declaration, set to expire November 15th. We are writing after receiving multiple urgent requests last week from key stakeholders in our state, including the Alaska Municipal League and leaders in health care, and after consultation with Legislative Legal staff. Our Legislative Legal attorneys determined the only unquestionably legal pathway for extension of the public health emergency declaration is through amending SB 241 in Special Session and for that we need your help.

The request from the Alaska Municipal League came following an emergency meeting of their board, an unusual event that underscores the seriousness of the situation. Local leaders are in a state of panic over what happens after November 15th and the expiration of the public health emergency declaration. As we have learned through briefings with AML leaders and municipal leaders statewide, the public health emergency declaration allows for effective coordination and response to the pandemic, something that is absolutely critical at this time. As stated in the letter we all received, there are numerous reasons they are concerned. From the letter,

“The very real possibility that the emergency declaration is not extended beyond November 15, or that nothing is put in its place, presents many of our members with very serious concerns. The majority of local declarations reference and are tied to the State’s declaration; the majority reference and leverage the State’s health mandates in the provision of their own. The ability to coordinate activities with the State, to work effectively across layers of government, and to respond quickly without wading through a regulatory morass – this is lost if that declaration expires. That has the potential to cause great harm both to our local economies and to our residents, who are depending on local governments for action and support.”

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During a meeting of the House Health and Social Services Committee we heard from health care leaders across the state that there will be real and potentially damaging public health consequences if the declaration expires. With the number of active Covid-19 cases skyrocketing right now we can't risk any disruption to our fragile health care system. Jared Kosin of ASHNA cautioned that with the dramatic increase in active cases we are seeing and the onset of the regular flu season health care facilities could be quickly overwhelmed.

Finally, there is the issue of unspent CARES Act dollars that are scheduled to no longer be available after December 31st. Of course we all hope that Congress will authorize an extension and additional relief, but we can't count on that and we can't afford to lose one dollar that came to Alaska. We will have tens of thousands of Alaskans out of work, businesses on the verge of closing, and families in crisis unable to pay for their basic needs of housing and food. Additionally, we must work together to find ways to support communities that have struggled to use their CARES funds because of all the restrictions. We must be strategic and meet the need in as many ways as possible to prevent the lasting damage this pandemic is causing to our state.

We are gravely concerned about the recent increase in active cases of Covid-19 and the ongoing stress this is putting on our neighbors, our state, and economy. We are experiencing a surge in cases like no other time during this pandemic. In March we had dozens of new cases every day and now we have ten times that with 353 new cases Saturday and 526 cases Sunday, we are seeing new records for our state. This should be a call to action.

If there was ever a time that Alaskans needed their Governor to lead it is now. Alaskans are looking to you to lead. We stand ready to assist and work together to overcome this pandemic, get kids safely back to school, people back at work, and our economy out of recovery and recession and into a period of growth. We all know that is what is in the best interests of Alaskans.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Bryce Edgmon in black ink.

Speaker Bryce Edgmon

Handwritten signature of Geran Tarr in black ink.

Representative Geran Tarr

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Harriet R. Drummond

Representative Harriet Drummond

Zack Fields

Representative Zack Fields

Andy Josephson

Representative Andy Josephson

Sara Hannan

Representative Sara Hannan

Dan Ortiz

Representative Dan Ortiz

Andi Story

Representative Andi Story

Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

Ivy Spohnholz

Representative Ivy Spohnholz

Adam Wool

Representative Adam Wool

Chris Tuck

Representative Chris Tuck

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Grier Hopkins

Representative Grier Hopkins

Neal Foster

Representative Neal Foster

Tiffany Zulkosky

Representative Tiffany Zulkosky

cc: Nils Andreassen, Alaska Municipal League
Jared Kosin, Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Association