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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS COUNTY OF MONO

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Shannon Kendall, Clerk of the Board

March 16, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

For more than a year, residents, businesses, and Mono County have diligently followed State and local health orders related to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic response. Local business owners and government agencies have invested millions of dollars to implement safety protocols and make required modifications, in addition to limiting or altogether shuttering overall operations. Together, Mono County and the Town of Mammoth Lakes have invested almost two million dollars in local rent support and business assistance grants to band-aid a collapsing local economy. These efforts and those of the State and Federal government have been wholly insufficient to save many of our local businesses. Now, as we near the “light at the end of the tunnel” that we have worked tirelessly to reach, the overly-conservative metrics with which we are required to achieve to advance within the State’s Blueprint for a Safer Economy (Blueprint) threaten to hold us back, without sound reasoning.

Rural communities face unique challenges not experienced by their suburban and urban counterparts. A one-size-fits-all approach to COVID-19 guidance, restrictions, and the ability to advance within the State’s prescribed Blueprint is simply not tenable for a county such as ours with a total population of 14,500. A single positive test result can keep our entire county hobbled in the Purple Tier indefinitely – yes, one single case. It is critical your administration create a program tailored to small counties that appropriately balances local public health and affords the local economy and schools the opportunity to begin to rebuild and recover. Metrics designed for large populations do not translate to rural, remote regions, and prove wholly inequitable in overall COVID-19 response.

As of this writing, Mono County has administered nearly 7,000 first dose vaccines, which accounts for nearly 50% of our overall total population. Nationally and locally COVID-19 cases continue to drop at a rapid pace. Mono County’s positive cases rarely translate into hospitalization. In fact, throughout the pandemic, Mammoth Hospital has been able to operate completely within capacity, never experiencing a surge in COVID-19 patients.

We have strived to balance our public health response and support for our local economy. Our public health has been protected, but our business community is suffering unparalleled and unprecedented economic devastation as a result of the inequitable statewide response. Our residents' financial survival is dependent almost exclusively upon a tourism-based economy, and we've now weathered several tourist seasons under various levels of restriction. We cannot afford another lost season, and quite frankly, cannot support the enforcement of guidelines that disproportionately impact our local business community.

Mono County and our residents feel unheard as our previous correspondence has gone unanswered, and our issues and concerns remain largely unaddressed. We echo the sentiment expressed by a number of other rural California counties struggling to balance public health and economic impacts of COVID-19, including our neighbors in Inyo County. The current Blueprint metrics make it nearly impossible for Mono County to advance to a less restrictive Tier beyond the Red Tier with no accounting for hospital capacity nor vaccination rate. We implore the State to revisit the metrics established for advancement within the Blueprint as they disproportionately penalize rural, remote communities with small populations. Public trust in the government's response to COVID-19 has eroded, and now that we are experiencing positive trends in both vaccination and diminished virus spread, we will be unable to enforce State guidelines and restrictions that no longer seem relevant, effective, or appropriate. We would be happy to work in collaboration with the State on an equitable approach for California's rural counties, and look forward to your response before we move into the Spring season.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Kreitz, Chair
Mono County Board of Supervisors
jkreitz@mono.ca.gov

CC: CDPH, CSAC, RCRC, Bigelow, Borgeas, Mammoth Lakes Town Council, Mono's Chambers of Commerce (?), School Districts (?) Congressman Obernolte