



KITSAP COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Efficient, accessible and effective county services

May 18, 2020

Robert Gelder
DISTRICT 1

Charlotte Garrido
DISTRICT 2

Edward E. Wolfe
DISTRICT 3

Governor Jay Inslee
Washington State Governor's Office

RE: Importance of Reopening Kitsap Separately from the State

Dear Honorable Governor Jay Inslee:

Thank you for your strong leadership to address the COVID-19 pandemic in Washington. Without the quick and decisive action taken by your office, this crisis could have spiraled out of control as it has done in other parts of the country.

This outbreak has hit different areas of our state to different degrees. While the east side of Puget Sound experienced the most health impacts especially in their congregate care facilities, other counties like Kitsap saw substantially fewer cases and tragic deaths. For example, Kitsap County has only 160 cases and 2 deaths since March 8 – even while our largest employer, the US Navy, required the majority of their employees to continue to leave their homes and come to the bases as essential workers.

While the Governor's order was in place for a portion of this time, the numbers illustrate Kitsap residents' commitment to social distancing and responsible citizenship.

This order is necessary to help protect public health, yet has carried a huge burden on our economy. While Kitsap's health impacts have been less, our economic impacts are just as significant as any other county in the state. Kitsap County has made substantial progress toward the public health variance criteria established by the Washington State Board of Health so we can move to Phase II and quickly as allowable. Data is forthcoming over the next week regarding our testing and tracing capabilities, hospital and health care capacity and ability to protect our high-risk populations.

Unfortunately, the eligibility for variances is limited to counties with less than 75,000 persons - regardless of health measures taken by the local officials. The number seems arbitrary, and should allow for larger counties to apply that take certain steps to protect public health and respond to outbreaks. These steps can be reviewed for the efficacy of their measure and approved or denied accordingly.

Additionally, to require that the jurisdiction have no positive cases within the last three weeks appears extreme. The efforts to "flatten the curve" are key and have been very successful, especially in our County. However, the requirement for no positive cases in three weeks seems geared to jurisdictions with no meaningful way to address the health impacts of an outbreak due to a lack of medical facilities and other responses. That is not the case for many counties including Kitsap and should be revisited. It

is an impossible metric to hit without a vaccine in place which is many months away. The curve must be flattened but not to a line.

A better metric may be infection rate within the population as a whole. Kitsap has seen only seven cases in the month of May in a population of 271,473 (.00003%). Additionally, recent epidemiology shows that these very limited positive cases are from out-of-County interactions further showing the lack of community-based transmission in Kitsap.

Kitsap County is prepared to take the steps necessary to reopen and work with our business community to ensure that they meet the necessary requirements before doing so. We have excellent examples in our construction industry as it has reopened with activities and inspections observing social distancing and avoiding transmission. We just ask for a near-term opportunity to allow more of our citizens to return to work under heightened and reasonable health protocols.

Again, thank you for all of your efforts and taking the time to review our request. The Board will have more information available next week regarding our health response capabilities and wish to submit a variance application as soon as we are eligible.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact us at (360) 337-7080.

Sincerely,


Charlotte Garrido, Chair


Edward E. Wolfe


Robert Gelder

cc: Kitsap Public Health District
Kitsap County Department of Emergency Management
Karen Goon, County Administrator