

Dear Senator Wilson,

The City of Saint Paul appreciates the Legislature's interest in and commitment to clarifying the roles and responsibilities of decision-makers during a disaster. Clearly, Alaska's lawmakers have a fundamental duty to provide oversight of the Administration's actions, to identify State actions that may otherwise have been made by the Legislature, and to address questions of appropriating and legislative authority.

Evidence suggests that decisions made to protect public health, in the form of mandates, effectively flattened the curve and preserved hospital and healthcare capacity, as they were intended. The consequences of those decisions impacted the economy, students, seniors, and our social structures.

The takeaway from this is less that decisions made to protect public health shouldn't have been made, but that additional decisions were and are warranted. The Legislature has a chance to act to help Alaska recover. Between budget and policy decisions, we encourage you to keep in mind the health and well-being of Alaskans and Alaska businesses.

The City of Saint Paul has played a crucial role in the overall effort to sustain both public health and economic activity. The CARES Act funding the City of Saint Paul received supported mitigation efforts in our community. I am proud to say that Saint Paul Island is still COVID free to date. This is due the partnerships we have developed with the Aleut Community of Saint Paul Island, TDX, Pribilof School District, Trident Seafoods, Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association, the DHSS public health team, Unified Command, and the Governor. We have all worked through challenges and combined efforts to meet the demands of this pandemic.

This pandemic has not ended with the beginning of the Legislative session, and it remains incumbent on all levels of government to work together to get through this public health emergency and economic disaster. I hope that the Legislature will work together with the Administration, and together with the City of Saint Paul, to continue to meet this threat. I trust that by acting in concert, we can steer Alaska through these challenging times.

The Legislature's integrity throughout Alaska's history has been crucial, making hard decisions when Alaska needed it most. The City of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Island Unified Command stands ready to offer solutions to future emergency planning protocols. However, I encourage you to meet today's challenges and put in place the action needed for Alaska's future.

Alaska and Saint Paul Island needs a disaster declaration in place. It doesn't have to be the Governor's proposed extension. It doesn't have to include bells and whistles, though those will need to be taken up as next steps. It doesn't have to last forever, but it needs to go beyond 30 days. We implore this body to either start over with a pared down version of SB 56 or draft your own declaration. Keep it simple, so that it can move quickly and meet a February 14 deadline. Act quickly and decisively, so that Alaskans may have faith in the role of the Legislature.

The easy justification for this request is that it allows the State to continue to be responsive to the crisis, as need warrants, to work closely with local governments like ours, and to move resources effectively to meet Alaska's needs. The City of Saint Paul needs State government to work during a disaster, and to have the flexibility necessary to support Alaska's communities.

There are scenarios where the Legislature doesn't act. The federal government may take a more active role, displacing Alaska decision-making. Local governments may need to continue to step in, but would need the State's remaining federal assistance funding to do so. Failure to issue a declaration – of your own or the Governor's – may have unintended consequences.

Please, pass a declaration so that Alaska has the tools necessary to meet the continuing challenges that face this state. Passage of a declaration will place the Legislature at the forefront of this response. Once this critical component is in place, I hope that we can spend the time necessary this session to strengthen Alaska's disaster response, by learning from the lessons experienced thus far.

If the legislator does not pass this declaration, you will limit the City of Saint Paul's ability to keep our community protected from the virus and keep it COVID free.

As legislators, you have the authority and will necessary to act with the duty of care that will be crucial for Alaska's recovery. Alaskans wouldn't have elected you otherwise. Our community is counting on you.

Phil

Txin qāgaasakuqing ~ Thank you

