



City of Homer

www.cityofhomer-ak.gov

Homer City Council

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February 22, 2021

Senate President Peter Micciche
Speaker of the House Louise Stutes

Greetings,

The Homer City Council is writing to express our support for the Alaska State Legislature to pass SB 56, or a similar bill, which will reinstate/extend Alaska's disaster declaration due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. We appreciate the recent progress in the Senate in moving the bill to the Senate Finance Committee and the outreach from the Alaska House Coalition to Governor Dunleavy. However, the current disaster declaration expired February 15, 2021.

Unlike some states, the State of Alaska does not have broad public health powers. In Alaska, public health measures are directly linked with the disaster powers. The tools associated with the disaster declaration provides a safety net for the governor, his administration, and local governments to respond flexibly and strategically. For instance, the previous disaster declarations have helped Alaska become the most vaccinated state in the country. However, most of Alaska's population (and the US population) remains vulnerable to the novel coronavirus.

Reinstating the disaster declaration assures the State's authority to distribute vaccines through mass vaccine clinics, procure and direct scarce supplies, and suspend certain statutes and regulations to allow health care providers and businesses to perform efficiently under the current circumstances. We are particularly concerned about what nonrenewal means for the State's vaccination effort going forward, and our health care system's ability to quickly respond should the virus, or variants of the virus, cause a rebound of cases in the State.

The recovery of our local economy has been dependent on mitigating COVID-19 transmission and supplying vaccine to all those who want it. The disaster declaration was an essential component of our ability to effectively respond to support both these efforts. Under the declaration, Homer's Unified Command team worked closely with the State to

- Coordinate local public information and education efforts with the Statewide response.
- Procure important and scarce PPE, testing, and voluntary vaccination supplies through the declaration's procurement regulations waiver.
- Mitigate intra and interstate COVID-19 transmission through the State's testing program in hub airports. As a spoke airport supporting business, medical and tourism travel, testing opportunities at hub airports greatly mitigates the potential travel-related disease transmission.
- Work with local industries to establish critical infrastructure guidelines as needed.

Our citizens benefitted directly from the disaster declaration as well; we would not want to lose current or upcoming economic relief resources by letting the Disaster Declaration lapse, particularly including the following:

- The ability to quickly establish non-congregate sheltering contracts waiving the more formal and lengthy process.
- The ability to use telehealth for medical needs.
- The potential loss of \$8 million in federal SNAP benefits and possibly other federal benefits.

We urge the Alaska State Legislature to quickly pass SB 56 or a suitably amended bill to reinstate Alaska's COVID-19 Disaster Declaration.

Thank you for public service.

CITY OF HOMER



Ken Castner, Mayor

Cc: Governor Dunleavy
Senate Finance Members
House Finance Members
Senator Gary Stevens
Representative Sarah Vance
Alaska Municipal League