



Skagit County Board of Commissioners

Ron Wesen, First District
Kenneth A. Dahlstedt, Second District
Lisa Janicki, Third District

May 12, 2020

Governor Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, Washington 98504-0002

Secretary John Weisman
Washington State Department of Health
1111 Israel Road Southeast
Tumwater, WA 98501

Dear Governor Inslee and Secretary Weisman:

We are writing today to request clear guidance on the timeline to reopen small businesses. In Skagit County, we hear daily from our shared constituents about the impact the closures have had on their ability to work and provide for their families.

Elected officials are tasked with navigating uncharted waters. We watched as the virus hit hard, and without much warning; spreading quickly throughout the State. Your swift decisive actions undoubtedly prevented COVID-19 from taking the lives of many and we are grateful for your leadership during this incredibly difficult time. Safe Start is a great roadmap for getting us back to normal life, but we are concerned that prolonged timelines could have unnecessary additional public health consequences.

As County Commissioners, we also serve on the Board of Health. Of course, our primary focus over the last several weeks has been slowing and stopping the spread of COVID-19, but we have not lost sight of the other health concerns in our community. Economic and housing stability are two things that are necessary for a healthy, thriving population. With many of our main street businesses shuttered, our Tulip Festival cancelled, and large regional businesses looking at layoffs, we are seeing less economic stability for our residents and worry that perpetuating these closures any longer will have long term impacts on the health of our community.

In semi-rural and rural communities like Skagit County, most of our employers rely on people physically being at work, like manufacturers and retail services. The professional class in urban areas is more likely to be able to telework, and thus our community – and particularly those in least able to afford more hardship - are likely to face disproportionate impacts of business closures. COVID-19 is one enemy of public health, but we fear that prolonging closures may end up being another.

While we appreciate the thoughtful approach you have taken to reopening portions of the construction industry and developing the Safe Start plan, we respectfully request you allow small retailers to open for in-person shopping as long as they can meet the social distancing standards. The big box stores have had an unfair advantage during this

pandemic. For example, Fred Meyer has been able to sell a lot more than groceries, while our family-owned work clothing shops such as Stowe's in Burlington and Oliver-Hammer in Sedro-Woolley are closed. The same is true of pharmacies where Rite Aid continues to operate, the locally-owned pharmacies are limited to drive up windows.

Finally, we thank you again for your leadership during this difficult time. Your efforts have saved the lives of many Skagit County residents, and Washingtonians at large, and for that, we will be forever thankful. We look forward to continuing to work with you in the fight against COVID-19.

Sincerely,

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
SKAGIT COUNTY, WASHINGTON**



Ron Wesen, Chair



Kenneth A. Dahlstedt, Commissioner



Lisa Janicki, Commissioner