



# SKAGIT COUNTY

## DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

2911 East College Way, Suite B, Mount Vernon, WA 98273 · (360) 416-1850

May 22, 2020

Governor Jay Inslee  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Secretary John Wiesman  
Washington State Department of Health  
101 Israel Road; MS: 47890  
Tumwater, WA 98504-7890

### **Re: Variance Criteria for counties with populations over 75,000**

Dear Governor Inslee and Secretary Wiesman:

We write today in support of the letter sent by the Skagit County Board of Health on May 22, 2020 asking you to allow Skagit County to move forward to Phase 2 of the Safe Start plan as soon as an application can be reviewed and authorized. Unified Command, led by Public Health, the Mount Vernon Fire Department, the Department of Emergency Management and the Sheriff's Department, is confident that Skagit County has the ability to safely enter Phase 2 and continue to control the spread of COVID-19.

Early in the crisis (March 23) Unified Command was activated because Skagit County recognized that a multi-jurisdictional effort would be needed to coordinate the efforts between Public Health, law enforcement agencies, and first responders. This sets us apart from many of the other counties in the state and is one of the reasons Skagit County has been successful in managing this pandemic. Our organizational structure has provided for operational branches focused on long term care, hospital coordination, responder safety, COVID-19 testing, case investigation, and isolation and quarantine. In addition we have established planning and logistic sections to aid the operational functions within the County.

Our success has been due to the coordinated response by the Unified Command structure which has ensured timely, effective collaboration across all impacted sectors of Skagit County. We have been able to quickly identify problems or hotspots, participate in outreach, and provide solutions. We've been particularly successful in securing PPE and testing supplies, which is done through our Department of Emergency Management and Unified Command. Moving forward, Unified Command will provide a structure to support the Public Health Department as the situation, guidance, regulations and protocols change. Unified Command will also provide logistical support to responders and local governments, our three local hospitals, communication mechanisms, and advanced planning for current and future needed actions.

We recognize that not every county has set up a Unified Command structure. We encourage you to tour our facilities, get an overview of how the structure functions, and gain an understanding of how it provides us a distinct advantage in the fight against COVID-19. Our structured response effort is what has allowed us to be so successful in the fight against COVID-19, and we strongly believe that if you see how we have structured our system you will understand why we are so confident in our ability to move to Phase 2. If you are interested in setting up a visit, please contact our Joint Information Center Manager, Laura Gelwicks, at [laurag@co.skagit.wa.us](mailto:laurag@co.skagit.wa.us).

We are sure that, across all sectors, Skagit County is ready to safely move to Phase 2 of the Safe Start plan. We ask that you give full and fair consideration to the Skagit Board of Health's request and allow Skagit County to move to Phase 2 as soon as an application can be processed and authorized.

Sincerely,

**SKAGIT COUNTY UNIFIED COMMAND**



Sheriff Don McDermott,  
Skagit County Sheriff's Office



Chief Bryan Brice  
Mount Vernon Fire Department



Jennifer Johnson, Director  
Skagit County Public Health