



## **Don't Slow Us Down! Alaska's Emergency Declaration is about Access to Resources and Economic Recovery, not Mandates**

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Like you, we are tired of COVID and want this to be over. But ending Alaska's public health disaster emergency declaration will not bring normalcy. Rather, it will delay the very thing we all want. That is why we are urging the Legislature to act immediately and extend the emergency declaration before the February 15 deadline.

Alaska's emergency declaration has nothing to do with mask mandates, hunker downs, school schedules, or restaurant closures. These are all matters of local control, and they will continue with or without the state declaration.

If that is the case, why does Alaska even need an emergency declaration? The answer is simple: to give us access to federal resources and flexibilities that benefit all sectors of our economy.

The COVID vaccine is the only way to end the pandemic and return to normal. In the health care sector, we are working tirelessly to make the vaccine available to Alaskans, all while combating outbreaks, meeting everyday health care needs, and staying prepared as contagious variant strains arrive in Alaska. Without an emergency declaration in place, we risk losing support from the national guard on testing and vaccination, flexibilities for COVID units in hospitals, and the ability to use telehealth and virtual medical visits. Risking this does not bring normalcy and freedom. Quite the opposite, it slows us down.

This is where the business community comes in. Healthy people are the foundation of a healthy economy. Any threat or break in the State's ability to accept and distribute vaccine, procure PPE, or receive other healthcare resources immediately impedes the progress we've made. Our first focus is keeping workers healthy and safe while secondarily ensuring our businesses can recover from the economic devastation they've endured. The emergency declaration has allowed for our essential industries to respond to the crisis without interruption to services and production. Without the extension, operations throughout the state and across many industries are under threat, causing an unnecessary and avoidable obstacle to getting our economy back on track.

Without the declaration in place, our local governments lose a critical partner and will have to take additional action to continue to ensure public health and welfare. Pandemic response requires cooperation between the federal, state, and local governments. The extension of the declaration simply allows for the State to be a good partner in that. It triggers the Alaska Disaster Act, which allows the governor to deploy resources quickly and effectively. That's



what Alaskans have depended on when facing earthquakes, floods, and fires. Local governments rely on the State's ability to move people and supplies to communities that need them, arrange mass vaccination and testing in places that don't have those powers or resources, and fill the gaps where there isn't the capacity or authority to act. Now is not the time to disrupt this.

Finally, the state disaster declaration has supported nimble collaborative efforts with the Alaska Tribal Health System that has moved Alaska to the top in responding to COVID. As the primary providers in rural Alaska, the Tribal health system has successfully stood up alternate care sites for COVID testing, treatments, and vaccination that are responsive for all Alaskans thanks to the state disaster declaration. As the state's primary provider of telehealth services, the Tribal health system has leveraged telehealth flexibilities to support safe delivery of care to patients all over Alaska, on and off the road system. If the disaster declaration went away, the supports and resources to the Tribal health system and all providers would go away. We cannot lose sight that as an integral part of Alaska's public health system, the Tribal health system and the State's vaccine operations have catapulted Alaska to be number one in the nation for per capita COVID-19 vaccination rates. We cannot afford to halt this progress.

We are so close to finishing this chapter of the pandemic. The fastest way forward is maximizing all available resources and flexibilities to bring this to an end, and Alaska's public health disaster emergency declaration does exactly that. Members of the Legislature, please act now. Alaskans are depending on you.