



OFFICE OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

509-659-3236
210 West Broadway Avenue, Ritzville, Washington 99169

John N. Marshall, District 1
Roger L. Hartwig, District 2
Terrance J. Thompson, District 3
Patricia J. Phillips, Clerk of the Board, Executive Services Manager

May 4, 2020

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

Dear Gov. Inslee,

From the beginning, Adams County has been committed to following the state's guidance regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone here has worked diligently to slow the spread to safeguard the residents of our county and its cities and towns.

Adams County has 48 confirmed cases among a population of 20,150. We are relieved and thankful to report that 45 patients have fully recovered and no one has died.

The "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" executive order has achieved remarkable success in the effort to flatten the curve. However, the cure may very well become worse than the disease for rural counties. Impacts, as a result of the virus, and now the response to it, are having devastating effects all across this great county.

Adams County residents are no strangers to overcoming great challenges. We have historically overcome adversity with hard work, dedication and true grit. Our first crop of wheat was harvested here in 1880 before the county formed in 1883.

With strong backs and strong wills we have become an agricultural mecca, playing a vital role in feeding the state, nation, and the world. We earned this distinction. Now, to preserve what we have built on the backs of our forefathers, we respectfully request the right to implement the steps necessary to reopen this county and its businesses as quickly as possible.

Adams County should be allowed to apply for a variance from the state to implement Phase 2 sooner, rather than later.

Our economy will feel the adverse effects of COVID-19 for many years to come. Small business closures, farm raised commodities slowly deteriorating in storage due to a lack

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of demand, rising crime, and the declining overall mental health and well being of our residents is evidence enough we need to move forward to Phase 2 immediately.

Our residents

Sooner or later the rent and mortgage payments will come due for the unemployed residents of Adams County. Based on Employment Security Department figures, more than 1,100 residents have been forced to seek unemployment benefits rather than being productive wage earners.

The Total Labor Force in Adams County is 8,972. In March, 8,269 were actively employed. Now, 1,183 or 14.3%, of them are out of work based on ESD filings.

Without a steady income, how can they continue to feed and care for their families and cover their daily expenses?

Adams County residents need to have the choice and the opportunity to return to work.

Small Business

Among our 850 businesses, more than half of them are small, micro operations with 10 or fewer employees. Many of these businesses are not classified as “essential” according to the state’s current restrictions. We respectfully disagree, not only are they essential, they are critical to the economic vitality of this county.

Governor, these business owners, entrepreneurs, and startups are the fabric and diversity of our communities. These owners come from all walks of life and deserve a fighting chance to continue on, despite COVID-19.

Our business owners raise their families here, they support other small businesses, provide local jobs, and create opportunities for many residents. The fruits of their labors contribute to the strength of our economy and community spirit. They financially support many good causes here including: local schools, churches, food banks, community nonprofits, and local festivals and events that celebrate our history, heritage, and cultures.

They need to reopen.

While state and federal funding and assistance is surely on the way. Mobilizing those resources has been slow, and awkward at best as no system was prepared for this viral hurricane that has touched every corner of this great nation. The result is the amplification of negative impacts on our residents.

Getting back to work is the best medicine.

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Healthcare

Othello and Ritzville have public hospitals. Columbia Basin Health Association is headquartered in Othello. All three healthcare facilities are struggling financially as a result of the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” restrictions.

Othello Community Hospital reports a \$1 million loss year-to-date, including a \$350,000 loss in March. From March 17, the hospital has admitted a total of five COVID-19 patients.

East Adams Rural Health Care has had zero COVID-19 admissions. CEO Corey Fedie predicts a \$400,000 to \$500,000 loss for April. This hospital district did receive \$211,000 from the first federal CARES Act relief package. Those funds helped offset losses in March.

“Folks here are anxious. This is not sustainable,” Fedie said recently. “We just need to open the doors to be able to take care of ourselves.”

Law Enforcement

The Adams County Sheriff’s Office, Othello and Ritzville Police Departments are experiencing increases in calls for service. Sheriff Dale Wagner reports that crimes of opportunity and desperation are on the rise.

Deputies and officers are regularly putting themselves at risk during this pandemic to keep our communities safe. They are responding to a rising number of domestic violence reports, suicidal subjects, thefts, business break-ins, and vehicle prowls.

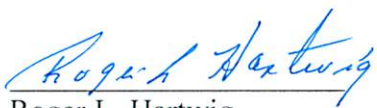
Our Request

Adams County, and our cities and towns, collectively and respectfully request the ability to immediately obtain a variance that will allow us to move to Phase 2 of the Washington Phased Approach.

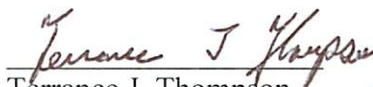
We thank you for your consideration of this request and would like a response at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
ADAMS COUNTY, COMMISSIONERS



Roger L. Hartwig
Chairman



Terrance J. Thompson
Vice-Chairman



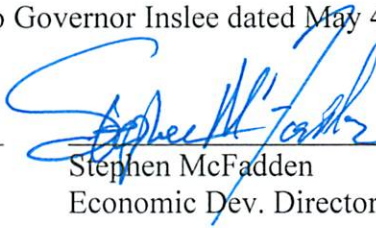
John N. Marshall
Commissioner

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Dale Wagner
Adams County Sheriff



Stephen McFadden
Economic Dev. Director



Randy Flyckt
Adams County Prosecutor



Mayor Shawn R. Logan
City of Othello



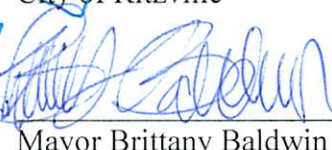
Mayor Gary Cook
City of Ritzville



Mayor Paula Bell
Town of Lind



Mayor Brian Hille
Town of Washtucna



Mayor Brittany Baldwin
Town of Hatton



Chairman Deena Vietzke
Port of Othello

Cc: Senator Mark Schoesler, 9th Legislative District
Representative Joe Schmick, 9th Legislative District
Representative Mary Dye, 9th Legislative District