



Board of County Commissioners
Multnomah County Chair
501 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Suite 600
Portland, Oregon 97214

June 4, 2020

Governor Kate Brown
State of Oregon
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Governor Brown,

Thank you for your leadership during the unprecedented crisis our state is facing with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are deeply concerned about morbidity and mortality from COVID-19 for older adults living at nursing homes and other long term care facilities, and we write to ask that you establish a State mandate for preventative, life-saving testing policies in these facilities.

Nursing home residents are particularly vulnerable to death from COVID-19, and it is clear that we are seeing significant numbers of deaths from the virus in nursing homes throughout Oregon. Residents are elderly, often frail, and often have other medical conditions that make them more prone to developing severe illness and dying from COVID-19. They also live in congregate settings, significantly increasing the risk of person-to-person transmission of the virus, even from asymptomatic carriers. Finally, nursing employees often work in more than one facility and are at increased risk of becoming infected themselves, and bringing the virus from one facility to another, even when they are asymptomatic. Based on the analysis of data about COVID-19 deaths in long term care facilities released by the Department of Human Services, it appears that over 50 percent of the Oregon's COVID-19 deaths have occurred in these facilities, even though there are only about 70,000 nursing home residents statewide, totaling less than 2 percent of the state's population.

There are a number of strategies for requiring testing in nursing homes, and since mid-April the governors of a number of states, including Washington, have issued Executive Orders requiring testing in a variety of ways. These range from testing all employees to testing both employees and residents. We support the creation of a proactive statewide strategy that addresses the needs of residents and employees.

Additionally, we believe residents who are identified as positive based on the initial testing, and/or residents who have symptoms, should be physically separated from the rest of the nursing home population. Lastly, scarce personal protective equipment (PPE) should be allocated to nursing homes in a way that ensures that frontline workers, the people they care for and their families can remain safe. We would be happy to work with you to determine the best next steps for Oregon given resource constraints.

We want to emphasize that, regardless of the strategy, time is of the essence in the work to save lives in these facilities, and we hope that you will move quickly to issue an executive order imposing a statewide mandate for COVID-19 testing for all long term care facilities in Oregon.

Thank you for your consideration, and, again, we appreciate all that you are doing for the state during this time of crisis.

Sincerely,



Deborah Kafoury
Multnomah County Chair



Sharon Meieran
District 1 Commissioner



Susheela Jayapal
District 2 Commissioner



Jessica Vega Pederson
District 3 Commissioner



Lori Stegmann
District 4 Commissioner

cc: Gina Nikkel, Association of Oregon Counties