

Office of the City Council

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May 5, 2020

The Honorable Janet T. Mills
Governor of Maine
1 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear Governor Mills:

I write today on behalf of the Ellsworth City Council and our community. Like you, we share a strong commitment to the health and welfare of the public. Prior to your executive order we issued a resolution banning short-term rentals through the month of April. This decision was made to slow the spread of the virus to prevent our healthcare system from being overwhelmed. Like you, we made our decision with available facts, and, with consideration for the safety of our community.

We now find ourselves at a different stage with new facts and data. Hancock County has recorded 10 confirmed cases of Covid-19, 8 people have recovered, 1 person has been hospitalized and we have had no deaths. Although we can assume that more people have contracted the virus, limited testing has prevented the capturing of this important baseline information. While we do not know the “spread” of the virus in our community, we do know that for those who have been infected it has not resulted in the need for intensive medical intervention. At no point in time have we found ourselves in the position of overwhelming our healthcare system. This is true across the state and has resulted in the implementation of your plan to re-open our businesses and community.

We are not writing as adversaries but as allies. You made several statements during your Friday afternoon press conference inviting participation into the decision-making process. You said, “We are constantly reevaluating the plan we’ve put forward, with input from all sources, to adjust it and to safely restart our economy” [and] “Continue talking, continue listening, continue being part of the solution”. We are writing to be part of the solution. Let me emphasize that we share your goal of opening businesses and the community in a safe manner. We do however disagree with aspects of your plan and approach. We want to share why we disagree, what we recommend and request an opportunity to move forward together.

Our first concern centers around the approach of opening businesses by business type. This is an artificial distinction that does not reflect the reality of the business community. The artificial identification of business type is disproportionately hurting our small businesses. More importantly, it is not grounded in, or supported by, data concerning health and safety. Your approach implies that the small business community is either not prepared or able to implement

appropriate safety measures. **We believe that all businesses should be allowed to open immediately, with the implementation of appropriate safety measures.** What is the difference between a small retail shop serving X number of individuals based on square footage and that of a big box store or grocery store? The City of Ellsworth is prepared to work with businesses, not as enforcement but as support. This public/private partnership will ensure the continued safety of our community while allowing us to begin to address the economic impact of this situation.

Our second concern deals with the 14-day quarantine provision for all out of state travelers. Our lodging businesses (including campgrounds) took an unexpected hit when this order was announced. The order keeps all visitors out of the state, regardless of the impact of Covid-19 in their community. New York provides a good illustration of this fact. Seven of the sixty-two counties in New York account for nearly 85% of the confirmed positive cases. That means that many travelers coming from out of state are likely to have less exposure than some of our Maine residents who reside in Cumberland county. Hancock county will be a destination spot for in-state travelers. Our health exposure will not be decreased by having an out- of- state 14-day quarantine but the economic damage from this 14-day quarantine will be devastating. We have heard that this could possibly be replaced by implementing testing. This is a false solution that provides no benefit, and, in all likelihood, will not be practical. Dr. Shah has been very clear that testing individuals who are not symptomatic presents no real value. While it might be possible to exclude people who test positive, what do you do with the individuals who test negative? The viral load of Covid-19 may not be present but the person could still be infected. **We do not support any restriction on travel into the state, instead we advocate for the implementation of strong public education for our summer guests and residents. In addition to guidelines that lodging facilities will implement, a strong public/private educational process will create an environment that increases safety by assuming that all people are infected. Equally important it allows us to open our economy that is vital for the small businesses in our community. Face coverings, hygiene protocols, social distancing are much more likely to be enforced within communities than would our ability to control a 14-day quarantine.**

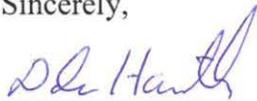
Our third concern stems from the fact that you are utilizing a “one size fits all approach”. The data that has emerged across the country shows that densely populated areas and congregate care settings are the most susceptible to this virus. This has also proven to be true in Maine. The effect of destroying our economy will have a far greater toll on the lives of our citizens than has the virus. Public polling¹ shows that Caronavirus concern has plateaued and is being replaced with concern over the economic impact to our economy. We hear the concern about a “second wave”, yet we don’t see any data that demonstrates that likelihood. We are quite concerned that decisions are being made without the presentation of data. We simply ask why are we keeping our businesses closed when we only have two active cases? **We are requesting an immediate opportunity to work with your administration to create a regional plan. A plan that can be implemented and managed locally.**

We are prepared to work with you and your administration to address these concerns. This is of the utmost importance and is time sensitive. Changes need to be implemented within the next

¹ <https://datassential.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Datassential-Coronavirus-Report-16.pdf>

two weeks to prevent a catastrophic economic event that will change our community and the lives of our residents for many years to come.

Sincerely,



Dale Hamilton
Chair, City Council

John Phillips
City Councilor



Marc Blanchette
City Councilor



Heather Grindle
City Councilor



John Moore
City Councilor



Michelle Kaplan
City Councilor

