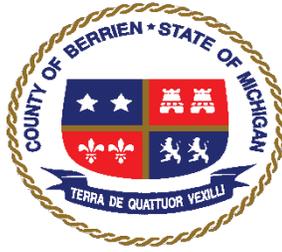


BERRIEN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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April 23, 2020

Governor Gretchen Whitmer
State Capital
110 S. Capitol Avenue
Lansing, MI 48933

Dear Governor Whitmer:

The Berrien County Board of Commissioners recognizes and fully supports the heroic efforts of frontline healthcare workers and first responders as well as workers in the service economy. Likewise, we appreciate the need for appropriate executive orders and policies to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus and promote public safety, while also protecting our state and local economies. Our region is dependent on agriculture and tourism. It is important that we preserve these economic engines and the jobs that are currently locked down. Accordingly, the Berrien County Board respectfully requests modifications to current and future executive orders to remain within the boundaries of Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) guidelines.

Berrien County has 157,000 residents, and as of 3:00 p.m. on April 22, 2020 there were 177 confirmed positive cases out of over 32,000 in the State of Michigan. It is logical to recognize that the virus is significantly more impactful on areas with high population density, and will disproportionately affect people of color and senior citizens with pre-existing illnesses, such as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. Executive action should not be based on the notion that one rule fits all locations. What is necessary for Southeast Michigan is not proving to be best for Southwest Michigan, the Upper Peninsula and other regions. Local and regional flexibility is now appropriate, along with the ongoing need for responsible behavior including social distancing, good hygiene and personal protective devices for certain business and commercial facilities. Our businesses and jobs are essential to Berrien County and the State of Michigan. If we and the similarly situated counties are held to the same standards as the handful of counties in which COVID-19 is prevalent, there will likely be irreparable damage to our economies and to the entire state.

The Berrien County Health Department is doing an outstanding job of mitigating, communicating, and recommending best practices as we go forward. The Board of Commissioners trusts the local public health officials to continue in their efforts to monitor and promote reasoned advice in connection with a safe re-opening of Berrien County; we likewise trust the vast majority of our business owners and citizens to act responsibly. This Board asks that you revise current Executive Orders to provide regional flexibility concerning the restrictions and prohibitions of occupational and personal activities as identified below, and to ensure a sensible and safe framework that respects the constitutional guarantees of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all citizens of the State of Michigan.

Governor Whitmer, Page 2.

The County Board supports allowing workers in occupations which can successfully mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and socially distance themselves, to be allowed to return to work. This should include manufacturing, production, property maintenance and food services. We believe this can be done in a responsible manner and with due caution. We also urge you to allow citizens to purchase such things as grass seed, house paint and gardening supplies, and to engage in recreational and outdoor activities which common sense should allow.

Those of us in border counties can readily understand why citizens are flocking to Lowes, Meijer, Walmart or Home Depot stores in Toledo, South Bend or Elkhart. They are driving across the state line because it is unreasonable to prohibit the purchase of these items in approximately 75 of the 83 Michigan counties. As you might expect, while those border county residents are purchasing their home improvement supplies in Ohio or Indiana, they are also buying groceries and filling their gas tanks.

In summary, the Berrien County Board of Commissioners urges you to move forward with an objective plan of action for re-opening our economy in conjunction with input from local governments, and with continued attention to public health and safety.

Very truly yours,

R. McKinley (Mac) Elliott
Chairman
Berrien County Board of Commissioners