

March 25, 2020

The Honorable Michael J. Dunleavy  
Governor of the State of Alaska  
Office of the Governor  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, State Capitol  
PO Box 110001  
Juneau, AK 99811



**Yukon-Kuskokwim**  
HEALTH CORPORATION



*Yuut Elitnaurviat*  
PEOPLE'S LEARNING CENTER



**Bethel Native**  
Corporation

Dear Governor Dunleavy,

We write to you as the regional leadership of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta to thank you for the guidance from the State of Alaska to slow the spread of the global COVID-19 pandemic in our state and to our individual communities. We also write to offer recommendations that we hope you will seriously consider implementing as soon as possible to protect rural Alaskans, particularly those we serve in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

As you know, the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta is approximately 55,000 square miles (roughly the same size as the State of New York or Washington). More than 25,000 Alaskans reside in 48 communities along the Yukon River, Kuskokwim River, and the Bering Sea Coast. There is no road system in our Region, and at this time of year the exclusive methods of transportation are by small aircraft, the ice road, or snow machine trails. The hub community for our region is the City of Bethel.

Our region is particularly vulnerable if we experience widespread community transmission of COVID-19. There is one regional hospital, the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation, located in Bethel. We rely exclusively on cargo planes and barges to deliver goods to Bethel, and on regional aircraft to deliver goods to the villages. Most of the households in our villages are multi-generational, with children, parents, and grandparents residing in the same household. Many households contain more than one family unit. Some households do not have running water/indoor plumbing. Grocery prices in our villages can be up to twice the price for the same goods in Anchorage.

If COVID-19 begins to spread in the YK-Delta, our healthcare system is vulnerable, our transportation system is vulnerable, our ability to meet basic needs for survival is vulnerable. By the time the coronavirus spreads to the YK-Delta, it will be too late to prepare for or mitigate the consequences.

This is why we are urging you to act immediately on two recommendations:

### **Shelter-In-Place/Stay-At-Home Order for Alaskans**

Health care professionals around the world agree that “social distancing” is one of *the* most effective things that can be done to slow the spread of this virus to avoid overwhelming our healthcare systems. Currently 18 states have issued shelter-in-place/stay-at-home orders. These measures can significantly improve the chances of surviving the pandemic without devastating federal, state, local, and tribal infrastructure, without being as extreme as the full-lock downs some countries have been forced to implement. Most importantly, this measure will save lives. While an important first step has been made to close schools, dine-in restaurants, and recreational facilities, we urge you to immediately issue the order for all nonessential business activities and movements to cease in order to truly give Alaska a fighting chance.

### **Protecting Alaska’s Transportation Infrastructure**

Perhaps more than any other State, Alaska relies on air services to move people and goods around the State. Our national and regional air carriers are essential to our State and local transportation infrastructure and we must protect them. Right now, the United States Congress is considering a \$2 trillion Coronavirus stimulus bill that contains relief for passenger air carriers, cargo carriers, and other eligible businesses, states, and tribes. We recommend that you work closely with the Alaska Congressional Delegation to ensure that air carriers in Alaska are included in this stimulus package and protected to the greatest extent possible.

The number of confirmed cases in Alaska is growing rapidly. We cannot handle the large explosion of cases that other states have experienced – especially in rural Alaska. Alaska is in a unique position to be the first state to act quickly and decisively to slow the spread of this disease before overwhelming our healthcare system and other critical infrastructure.

Please take action now.

*Vivian Korthuis*

Vivian Korthuis (Mar 25, 2020)

Vivian Korthuis, Chief Executive Officer  
Association of Village Council Presidents

*Dan Winkelman*

Dan Winkelman, President & CEO  
Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation

*Michael J Hoffman*

Michael J Hoffman (Mar 25, 2020)

Michael Hoffman, Executive Director  
Yuut Elitnaurviat

*Daniel Walker*

Daniel Walker (Mar 25, 2020)

Dan Walker, Superintendent  
Lower Kuskokwim School District

*Ana Hoffman*

Ana Hoffman (Mar 25, 2020)

Ana Hoffman, President/CEO  
Bethel Native Corporation

Cc: The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
The Honorable Dan Sullivan  
The Honorable Don Young