

Alaska State Legislature

*Representative Louise Stutes
Speaker of the House*

*Representative Chris Tuck
Majority Leader*

*Representative Matt Claman
Majority Whip*



*Representative Bryce Edgmon
Rules Chair*

*Representative Neal Foster
Finance Co-Chair*

*Representative Kelly Merrick
Finance Co-Chair*

Date: March 17th, 2021

To: The Honorable Michael J. Dunleavy
Governor, State of Alaska

Re: Support for Disaster Declaration Extension

Delivered Electronically

Dear Governor Dunleavy,

Your stewardship through the COVID-19 pandemic has protected the health of our residents, the resilience of our economy, and facilitated the nation's strongest vaccination campaign. We thank you for your exemplary leadership during these challenging times.

With three-quarters of Alaskans still unvaccinated, we must continue to safeguard the health of our residents and economy until herd immunity is reached. This is accomplished by maximum flexibility in healthcare and testing, as well as by ensuring Alaska remains fully eligible for federal COVID-19-related aid. Only an emergency declaration provides that broad authority and certainty.

HB 76, introduced by your administration to extend the disaster declaration, is currently being considered in the House Finance Committee. We understand that the administration no longer supports the extension and believes it can attain the necessary authorities to combat COVID-19 absent said declaration. We respectfully disagree.

Further, testimony on HB 76 in the House Finance Committee clarified that healthcare professionals, businesses, and municipalities across the state also believe the extension of the disaster declaration is necessary.


The Alaska Public Health Association, Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association, Alaska Chamber, Alaska Municipal League, Alaska Primary Care Association, Food Bank of Alaska, Alaska Food Coalition, and the Alaska Children's Trust all testified in support of the current version of HB 76, citing the concerns raised above.

We respectfully urge you to work with us on COVID-19 legislation that includes a disaster declaration provision. This would allow the administration the full authority, at your discretion, to continue to respond to the pandemic and retain Alaska's eligibility for EA SNAP benefits and blanket waivers.

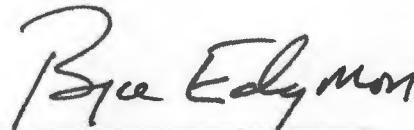
This issue is being politicized, but the reality is that extending the disaster will not restrict freedoms or hinder economic recovery; in fact, it will have the opposite effect by facilitating a swifter end to the pandemic and bolstering economic recovery with federal dollars. Finally, a disaster declaration does not require mask mandates, occupancy restrictions, or hunker down orders.

We look forward to working with you to ensure Alaska has the tools necessary to fight this ongoing pandemic and doing so in a timely manner.

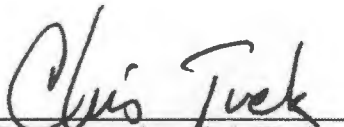
Sincerely,



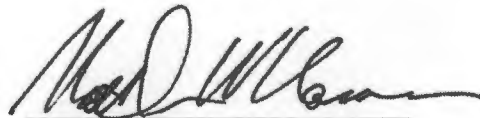
Representative Louise Stutes
Speaker of the House



Representative Bryce Edgmon
Rules Chair



Representative Chris Tuck
Majority Leader



Representative Matt Claman
Majority Whip



Representative Neal Foster
Finance Co-Chair



Representative Kelly Merrick
Finance Co-Chair