



February 8, 2021

32<sup>nd</sup> Alaska Legislature  
Senator David Wilson, Chair  
Senate Health & Social Services Committee  
[senator.david.wilson@akleg.gov](mailto:senator.david.wilson@akleg.gov)

Dear Senator Wilson,

The Petersburg Borough Assembly supports Governor Dunleavy's request to extend Alaska's current Declaration of a Public Health Disaster Emergency, through Senate Bill 56, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The current State of Alaska contract extension with the Petersburg Borough to provide airport travel testing that allows Petersburg to meet the State Interstate and International Travel Health Order #6, is weighted to be contingent upon the State's Disaster Declaration. If the Declaration is terminated, the contract for testing will also be terminated. The testing program at our airport has been instrumental in detecting COVID-19 in passengers arriving to Petersburg. The coronavirus has been controlled and contained in these cases by identifying COVID positive individuals and allowing local medical and public health officials to perform contact tracing and isolate the cases. Without the testing program, there is certainty that future passengers that may not know of their infection will be able to enter the community without restriction and spread the virus to the detriment of our population and medical facilities.

Petersburg has depended on many State Health Orders during the pandemic. Travel testing and Seafood Industry mitigation plans have been vital in protecting our remote population and ensuring that our primary economic driver, commercial fishing, remains in operation without negative impacts from the coronavirus. Without the Declaration and Health Orders, we would have been at the mercy of the virus for the entire processing season. The same will be true in 2021 if the protective Health Orders are rescinded and the virus is allowed to propagate in our processing facilities and fishing fleet. An important step in Petersburg's economic recovery is to make sure that our businesses and industry can remain open and operational until the pandemic is over.

**Borough Administration**

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The State Emergency Operations Center has worked to exhaustion during the pandemic to support the individual communities dealing with the impacts of COVID-19. The SEOC has provided guidance to local EOCs on State Health Orders and advice for supplying communities with personal protective equipment. Additionally, they have provided information and planning for the next phases of the statewide response. If Governor Dunleavy's Disaster Declaration is terminated, it is believed the SEOC will stand down and the resources that have been available across the state will dwindle, leaving local EOCs to fend for themselves without the level of support and leadership currently available.

Many State departments are focused on meeting the goals and objectives of the Disaster Declaration. One of the current goals may be the most important to date – distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines to our population – which is facilitated by the Department of Health and Social Services in Alaska. Lack of a Disaster Declaration shifts the focus of this department to business as usual and takes away from the mission to vaccinate our residents and truly arrive at the end of the pandemic.

The Disaster Declaration allows for response and provides the necessary infrastructure to do so. It removes restrictions and allows the State to act effectively to meet Alaska's needs. The Declaration prioritizes Alaska's economic recovery and the movement of critical infrastructure, helps to implement workplace safety protocols, and promotes safe travel into and within Alaska.

Through the diligence and efforts of the State of Alaska and our local EOC, Petersburg's COVID-19 positive case numbers have been low. Our children are enjoying in-person school and our businesses are open.

Alaska is at the forefront of the nation regarding COVID-19 testing, voluntary vaccination, and implementation of economic recovery measures at the local level. We encourage this Legislature to pass an extension of the Declaration of a Public Health Disaster Emergency so we Alaskans have the tools to face the challenges before us.

Respectfully,

Mark Jensen  
Mayor

Cc: Senator Bert Stedman  
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins