



March 18, 2020

Co-Chair Senator Arnie Roblan
Co-Chair Representative Paul Holvey

Senator Denyc Boles	Senator Brian Boquist	Senator Lynn Findley
Senator Sara Gelser	Senator Tim Knopp	Senator Kathleen Taylor
Senator Laura Monnes Anderson		
Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward		
Representative Greg Barreto	Representative Janelle Bynum	
Representative Paul Evans	Representative Raquel Moore-Green	
Representative Andrea Salinas	Representative Duane Stark	

To the Members of the Joint Special Committee on Coronavirus Response:

Rural Development Initiatives (RDI) is writing to petition the members of the Joint Committee to consider the specific and unique impact of the coronavirus pandemic on rural Oregon communities. RDI is grateful to the members of the Joint Committee for their attention to this vitally important issue.

Oregon's small towns will face the same complex outcomes as larger population centers, in more geographic isolation, with fewer financial resources, few models designed to fit their situation, and more confusing or less trusted information sources. Rural economies are characterized by a high dependency on low-wage workers, limited access to healthcare, dilapidated facilities, and inadequate access to child care and senior services, which magnifies the negative impact of the coronavirus crisis in rural places.

In our experience, if the rural perspective on the impact of this unprecedented pandemic is not understood, there is the potential that the Oregon legislature will leave rural economies and social services behind in policy making as they respond to this important health crisis.

A recent article in The Oregonian provided insights from the personal experience of rural Oregonians:

https://www.oregonlive.com/coronavirus/2020/03/as-coronavirus-spreads-oregons-rural-counties-have-the-same-concerns-but-fewer-resources.html?utm_campaign=theoregonian_sf&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook

When RDI began, first, as the Community Initiatives Program of the Oregon Economic Development Department (1989), then later, as a private nonprofit transformed by SB713 (1992), our charge was to assist rural communities experiencing abrupt and devastating changes to their economies. For 28 years, RDI's staff has worked alongside people in

Oregon's rural communities as they have grappled with ongoing economic challenges and instabilities, reimagined new economic and community building strategies, built the leadership skills needed to work together, and rolled up their sleeves to do the work.

RDI asks the Joint Committee to consider (1) disaggregation of data related to the pandemic to identify rural needs, (2) development of rural-specific solutions in partnership with community-based agencies and others with rural expertise, (3) including rural representation on work groups and task forces dealing with the crisis, (4) ensuring that emergency resources reach the furthest corners of the state in a timely fashion, and (5) a focus on the disproportionate impact to small businesses and the Latinx and tribal communities in Oregon's rural places.

Thank you for your timely and thoughtful service to the residents of Oregon in dealing with this unprecedented emergency.

Rurally yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heidi Khokhar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Heidi Khokhar
Executive Director

