



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 19, 2020

Dear Co-Chair Arnie Roblan, Co-Chair Paul Holvey and members of the JSCVR,

We need a strong response to prevent the spread COVID-19 coronavirus as well as an immediate and strong economic response to help working families and our economy stay whole through this pandemic. We need to ensure adequate PPE supplies, testing resources for COVID-19, a strong social distancing plan, telehealth triage capacity, increased hospital beds and ventilators. I have been working closely with Carolyn Egan from the City of Bend and the City of Bend's Economic Development Department. This is a comprehensive package of ideas that needs to be implemented immediately to help keep our families and community safe and able to thrive through these unprecedented circumstances.

As we implement social distancing, a swift and targeted policy response is needed to protect the financial security of Oregon families and businesses. For the majority of Oregonians their financial security is connected to their employer's ability to stay open and provide goods and services. To be effective the immediate policy response must be comprehensive and provide both direct assistance to families and support businesses to keep employees working and reduce disruption to services and income. Deschutes County is home to over 520 food service establishments (with nearly 400 of them in the City of Bend). Those establishments have over 8,000 employees with total payroll estimated to be \$46M in just one month. The City of Bend's Economic Development Department suggests the following targeted policies:

STATE ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE NEEDED:

1. Get Unemployment Benefits out quickly, double the amount in the first check

The Oregonians who were laid off in the last two weeks are predominantly hourly wage earners and are used to receiving wages daily (tips) and weekly (paycheck). The more quickly the Employment Department gets benefits to claimants the better off they will be.

2. Allow businesses to continue health insurance coverage for employees while employees are on unemployment insurance. This will reduce disruptions of their unemployment benefits and allow continued care through the pandemic

3. Release State Funds to Oregon Trail cards.

This will allow families to get out to stores now to get items for their families. We think that the immediate release should be 200 percent of the typical monthly allocation.

4. Release everything available in existing housing funds.

This will allow more families to apply for and obtain emergency rental assistance and offer an option to homeless Oregonians to be housed in hotel rooms rather than in warming shelters where risk of contamination is high.

5. Allow a temporary (12 month) Unemployment Insurance Tax suspension.

Employers keep their cash and can spend that cash on paying sick leave, healthcare, paying vendors, etc.

6. Delay Oregon Tax payment deadline to match IRS revised deadlines.

7. Allocate funds (\$10M+) to Community Action Partnership of Oregon (CAPO) network for rental assistance (our local agency is NeighborImpact).

Using the existing network with established qualification criteria is essential to getting funds to the most vulnerable families.

8. Allocate funds (\$5M+) to Community Action Partnership of Oregon (CAPO) network for food assistance and logistics. This complements Oregon Trail allocation.

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9. **Allocate funds (\$5M+) to Neighbor Works America network and/ or CDFIs (Craft3) for commercial (namely restaurants and bars) rental/mortgage assistance.** It is vital that short term support is available while businesses prepare documentation that will allow them to request an SBA loan. We need immediate access to capital for business owners to bridge funds for payroll, benefits, and rent and mortgage payments.
10. **Allocate funds (\$5M+) to Oregon Health Authority.**
These funds can be used to reimburse hotels for overnight stays for healthcare workers who are serving at hospitals but don't want to go home due to concern about infecting family members. This will also help maintain our overnight lodging operators.
11. **Use Oregon Food Bank network to distribute sanitation supplies to low income households and to expand meal service delivery to older Oregonians.**
12. **Suspend Implementation of the Commercial Activity Tax until 2021.** School funding should be prioritized and supplemented with the general fund account while we work through stabilizing jobs, businesses and our economy.

OTHER STATE ACTIONS RELATED TO THE EMERGENCY:

If a major disaster is declared by the Federal government, Oregon should:

- Ensure that a "direct public assistance" category is included in our request to the President. This will allow the public to apply for relief directly from the federal government.

The COVID-19 virus presents the nation, Oregon and our communities with an enormous public health and economic crisis. Our top priority must be to stop the spread of the virus and manage the personal and public health consequences. At the same time, our elected officials along with business and union leaders must come together and act urgently to address the economic fallout from the pandemic. We need to act with urgency to help Oregonians when they need us most.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Cheri Helt
State Representative
House District 54

Carolyn Eagan
Economic Development Director
City of Bend