

Cottage Grove Sentinel
116 N. Sixth St.
Cottage Grove, Ore. 97424

Opinion

The First Amendment
Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." —Thomas Jefferson (1800)



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Letters to the Editor Policy

The Sentinel welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside The Sentinel readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

Political/Election Letters:

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must: 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn't follow the above criteria.

Send letters to:

nhickson@cgsentinel.com

An Open Letter To Lane County

She had been hospitalized but was now recovering at home. Her symptoms first began on Feb. 23. The woman went untested for 25 days, until the symptoms came to a point that testing was deemed necessary on March 18.

It is unknown if or when she went into isolation during that period.

All of this information was made available and confirmed by LCPH Public Information Officer Jason Davis.

The one thing LCPH was unable to confirm? The community in which the woman resides, referring instead to a location "in rural Lane County."

There are approximately 4,200 miles that constitute "rural Lane County." Included within it are hundreds of communities, many of which have sizable populations. This includes Cottage Grove and Creswell, as well as Elmira, Junction City and the Siuslaw region of Florence, Dunes City, Mapleton, Swisshome, Tide and unincorporated areas that make up an estimated 16,000 residents in total.

If LCPH statements only identify confirmed cases as being in "rural Lane County," then every community not within the Eugene/Springfield region could potentially assume they are the latest location with the virus.

And if every community outside of the Eugene/Springfield area thinks it has the latest COVID-19 case, it could create ongoing county-wide confusion, with communities — and local news outlets

— unable to confirm facts and dispel rumor.

In addition, Lane County's refusal to share information could also make the spread of the disease worse while weakening community efforts to effectively combat the disease.

Ultimately, we realize that the protocols currently in place will not change without public engagement and a demand for transparency.

It has nothing to do with identifying individual cases; it is about helping communities track the spread in general, regardless of whether you live in Eugene/Springfield or rural Lane County. As it stands, if 10 new cases are confirmed in the metro area, it's easy to identify a sudden increase or "hot spot" in a specific area.

However, if 10 new cases are confirmed in "rural lane County," that could be 10 isolated cases in a nearly 4,000-square-mile radius — or it could be 10 cases all in Cottage Grove, Creswell, Elmira or other small community.

How would anyone in those rural communities know if there is a concentrated outbreak in their area or not? And for folks in Eugene/Springfield, they might want to know that information as well if they have family living in those rural areas.

I think knowing the track of spread and the rate of that spread in specific areas is important information for all communities in Lane County — not just the Eugene/Springfield area.

As a community news

source, we are constantly reminding our readers that we only report on information that we can verify through official and legitimate sources. Yet in the case of confirming or denying cases of COVID-19 in our communities, there is no verification process available to us.

I have reached out to other news outlets in Lane County in the hopes that they will share this information with their communities in order to affect change in the county's protocols — either by running this open letter, writing their own or by reporting on this effort.

We have been relying on — and would like to continue to rely on — official information from Lane County in order to limit the amount of rumor, assumption and misinformation that can occur without official sources.

I feel it is imperative that people in the community have a full understanding of the situation at hand, and if/when COVID-19 is officially confirmed in our communities so that they can respond accordingly.

By not being able to officially verify specific information for communities outside of Eugene/Springfield, the current LCPH protocol is potentially fostering a dangerous situation that could in fact make the spread of COVID-19 worse in isolated areas.

Ned Hickson,
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