

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)



DC Commissioners issue statement about latest risk level assessment

The Douglas County Board of Commissioners are very concerned about our recent surge in COVID cases, and dismayed to learn that our case counts in the last two weeks have prompted the State of Oregon to move Douglas County from the State's Mandated High COVID Risk Level to the State's Mandated Extreme COVID Risk Level, thus imposing stricter guidelines on our residents and businesses.

We do painfully recognize that the impact of the state moving us to the Mandated Extreme COVID Risk Level will be felt the most by Douglas County's small local businesses, especially our restaurants, bars and gyms, rather than by where the most recent rash of cases have been reported (i.e. our long-term care facilities, churches, schools and by residents who have chosen to host large events).

This scenario continues to illustrate the issue we have with the State's "one-size-fits-all" approach to their COVID restriction metrics and programs.

As our county moved to the State's Mandated Extreme Risk Level that began Feb. 26, commissioners realize that many local businesses are likely to stay open and challenge the state's guidelines for this new risk level.

As your commissioners always have and will continue to do, we stand with, represent and support the citizens and businesses operating in Douglas County. We want our residents to be healthy and have access to necessary services; we want to help our businesses succeed; and we want everyone in our county to continue to move forward with social and economic stability.

While Douglas County currently has no ability to shield or protect our businesses from state sanctions, penalties and fines, we are here to help in any way we can.

We do want to encourage our local businesses to follow the appropriate precautions to prevent the spread of the virus, as well as, protect their businesses, their patrons and their ability to continue to keep their doors open.

Commissioners continue to be incredibly frustrated with

the lack of local input being allowed at the state level, especially when determining the State's current COVID Risk Level Program, instituted in December 2020.

DOUGLAS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

The state's new mandated program undeservedly punishes and brutally affects our local businesses ability to operate and stay financially stable during this pandemic. Especially when the businesses that have suffered the most during the state's mandated Risk Level restriction periods (our restaurants, our coffee houses, our dance studios, our senior centers, our small retail stores, our bars and our gyms), are among some of the safest places to go during the pandemic.

These businesses are required to follow some of the most stringent COVID safety and health guidelines. For the most part, our businesses have been extremely responsible to our communities, and in following the COVID-19 guidance coming from the State.

The adoption of the Oregon OSHA COVID-19 Standard in late 2020 further shows that Oregon workplaces are some of the most sanitary places for customers and employees to be. Public health officials, coupled with our local outbreak data and statistics, have stated very clearly that COVID-19 is spreading in Oregon and in Douglas County for reasons unrelated to our businesses being open. In fact, cases at restaurants, bars and gyms accounted for only 1 percent of our total positive cases in the last two weeks.

Our local data for COVID cases showed that of the current 280 active COVID cases that DPHN is supporting in isolation:

- There are *no* COVID outbreaks created or active at any gyms, restaurants or bars in Douglas County.
- Of those 280 active cases, we only have 4 positive cases associated with any gyms, restaurants or bars in Douglas County.
- Currently, there are no other employees at any other gyms, restaurants or bars that have

active or positive cases at this time.

As we have asserted before, Douglas County Commissioners do not support county "enforcement" of state-issued COVID guidelines. Instead, as the local public health authority, we feel it is paramount for State of Oregon Officials to provide easy-to-understand,

timely access to the latest information, resources and medical guidance in order to educate residents about COVID-19 that allows them to make informed, responsible decisions.

We feel that most people will do the right thing, if given the opportunity and knowledge to do so. We cannot, in good conscience, condone citing or potentially arresting people for trying to make an honest living.

While we understand the need for increased measures to slow the spread of the virus due to the recent dramatic increase in local COVID-19 cases, we do not agree with a statewide mandated approach. Further, Douglas County Government will not enforce the mandates for these somewhat draconian rules against our citizens mandated without local consultation. We recommend that residents contact one of the state legislators representing your district, and ask them to engage in the fight to help our local business and residents.

There are seven state legislators that represent a portion of Douglas County.

Commissioners believe that there must be a better balance between the socio-economic damage being done to our businesses, and the fight to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our communities, while also protecting the health and wellbeing of our residents. While we have seen a rise in COVID-19 cases, we have also seen far too many businesses close; residents lose their jobs and struggle to get assistance to pay their bills; seniors continuing to live in isolation and anguish; and far too many families and children suffering with financial, mental and educational woes. We are fearful that with the movement to the state's Extreme Risk Level that there will be many more unintended consequences for our residents.

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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.

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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.

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