

Union County sheriff chastises Brown's mask mandate in letter

■ Sheriff Cody Bowen contends governor's requirement is unconstitutional

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**

The (La Grande) Observer

LA GRANDE — Frustration.

That is the theme echoed throughout Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen's personal letter to Gov. Kate Brown regarding the recent statewide mask mandate for public schools. Bowen listed his reasons for concern and called for local control on decision making in a letter to Brown on Friday, Aug. 13, and posted on social media.



Brown

"I believe that as Americans, we have a right to choose," Bowen said. "This isn't a law and it hasn't been voted on by the people."

Bowen, a parent himself, advocated for parents making their own decisions on whether children in school should wear masks. In the letter, Bowen wrote he hopes to open a dialogue and speak on behalf of the people of Union County.

The letter states he believes the mandate is unconstitutional and he is against threatening the livelihoods of teachers. Bowen is referring to the potential fines and loss of teaching licenses for teachers and staff who do not enforce the mandate. This has been a hot topic of debate at recent school board meetings in the area, with concerned parents and community members voicing their opposition.

"They know what's right, but they're scared that if they stand up, then teachers might lose their jobs," Bowen said. "They're trying to do what's best and I don't envy any of the superintendents because they're in a terrible spot."

At the Union and Imbler board meetings, a majority of members on the board expressed their opposition to the mandate. However, with the risks facing the schools and teachers, little ground was made in negotiations between parents and board members.

The La Grande and Union



Alex Wittwer/The (La Grande) Observer

Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen sent a letter to Gov. Kate Brown on Friday, Aug. 13 opposing her mandate for students and staff in public schools to wear masks to help curb the spike in the coronavirus.

"I don't think it's one individual person's job to put their neck on the line, but if I have to be the guy that does that and stand up for what I believe is right, then so be it."

— Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen

school boards both voted in favor of wearing masks this school year, amid pushback from parents. Imbler makes its decision on Tuesday, Aug. 17. Bowen supports parents' choice to send their children to school in masks, but he opposes forced mask use.

In the letter, Bowen implored Gov. Brown to listen to her constituents and stop ignoring the eastern side of the state. Bowen also stated that as sheriff, the mandate is not a law and not something he can enforce. That being said, Bowen has a vested interest based on his constituents and his own personal opinion.

Bowen was elected to the Union County sheriff's position in 2020. According to Bowen, calls to his office from the community were a major reason in his decision to write the letter to the governor. Bowen said he does not expect other sheriff's offices in the region to make similar statements, but would appreciate the support.

"I don't think it's one

individual person's job to put their neck on the line, but if I have to be the guy that does that and stand up for what I believe is right, then so be it," he said.

Brown announced in late July that masks will be required for anyone inside of a school in Oregon this year.

"The science and data are clear: the delta variant is in our communities, and it is more contagious," Brown said in a statement at the time. "My priority is to ensure our kids are able to safely return to full-time in-person learning this fall, five days per week and with minimal disruptions. With many children still ineligible to be vaccinated, masks are an effective way to help keep our kids safe in the classroom, the learning environment we know serves them best."

During the outbreak in 2020, the decision to require masks was in the hands of local school districts. Most districts followed the Oregon Department of Education's lead,

by "strongly advising" masks and following the governor's recent decision, some school leaders expressed surprise at the governor's announcement and voiced their interest in making school health decisions at the district, rather than the state, level.

In a statement from the Oregon Department of Education, officials said they are working to create a rule requiring face coverings in all indoor school settings — both public and private — for all individuals age 2 and older. This includes students, staff, contractors, volunteers and visitors.

Officials say the rule will take effect upon adoption, but the exact date is unclear. Summer school and students and staff in other summer programs will also be required to wear face coverings when the rule is instituted.

The rule will include provisions for eating, drinking, playing a musical instrument that requires using the mouth and certain sports — including swimming, gymnastics and wrestling.

Oregon Public Broadcasting reporters Jeff Thompson and Elizabeth Miller contributed to this report.

COVID-19 SURGE CONTINUES

Oregon hospitals nearly at capacity

■ Officials said on Tuesday, Aug. 17 that 93% of adult beds, and 90% of intensive care beds, were filled

By **SARA CLINE**

Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND — As Oregon's health system continues to be clobbered by the state's worst COVID-19 surge, officials reported on Tuesday, Aug. 17 that 93% of the state's hospital beds for adults and 90% of the intensive care unit beds are full.

There are 838 people hospitalized with COVID-19 in Oregon — surpassing the state's record, which was set the previous day, by 86 patients. Before this month, the hospitalization record was 622 in November, during a winter surge and when vaccines were not available.

"If you are healthy today, you may not think this impacts you. But when our hospitals are full, all Oregonians are at risk," Gov. Kate Brown tweeted on Tuesday afternoon. "When our hospitals, emergency departments, and ICUs are full, that means a staffed hospital bed may not be available when you and your family need urgent or intensive care, whether for COVID-19, or a car crash, or a heart attack or stroke."

As of Tuesday a mere 66 ICU beds and 275 available adult non-ICU beds are available, the Oregon Health Authority reported.

Oregon also set a new daily case record with 2,941 identified coronavirus cases — fueled by the highly transmissible delta variant, which has rapidly spread, especially in southern Oregon where vaccination rates lag.

"If you are unvaccinated, you are at incredible risk from the Delta variant," Brown tweeted. "Almost everyone hospitalized for COVID-19 could have avoided severe illness if they had been vaccinated."

Over the past month Brown has announced measures to decrease the infection rate and hospitalizations and boost vaccinations. Recent measures include requiring that health care workers and state employees be vaccinated.

In addition, on Friday, Aug. 13 a statewide mask mandate was reimplemented — everyone in Oregon who is 5 years or older, regardless of vaccination status, must wear a mask in indoor public spaces.

Last month, Brown announced that masks would be required regardless of vaccination status in K-12 schools. However, some education leaders have pushed back, including school board members in public meetings and administrators in written communications to parents.

On Tuesday, Brown urged leaders to follow her mask mandates and not "jeopardize" the return to full-time in-person instruction.

"I have heard much about personal freedom when it comes to masks in school board meetings and on social media. I have not heard as much said about personal responsibility," Brown wrote in a letter. "As leaders, we have a great responsibility to our students and their futures. One of the sacred, fundamental responsibilities of a school district and its leaders is to keep the children in their care safe. It is up to us to make clear-eyed decisions based on science and fact."

Oregon sets daily record for new COVID-19 cases

Oregon set a new daily record Tuesday, Aug. 17 with 2,941 identified coronavirus cases, shattering the old mark, as the number of Oregonians hospitalized with COVID-19 soared higher.

Health officials reported 838 people are currently hospitalized in Oregon with COVID-19. That's 86 more COVID-19 patients than Monday, or an overnight increase of 11%.

Tuesday's numbers also included more grim news: 15 reported deaths, and a daily test positivity rate of 12.2%. Oregon's old records for daily cases both came last week: 2,329 on Aug. 10 and 2,387 on Aug. 12.

— Douglas Perry, The Oregonian

Brown extends foreclosure moratorium

By **PETER WONG**

Oregon Capital Bureau

Gov. Kate Brown has extended a temporary halt to residential foreclosures through Dec. 31.

Monday, Aug. 16, was the deadline under a law passed by the 2021 Legislature for Brown to announce the second of two extensions. She had already announced the first extension, which is in effect through Sept. 30 — the same day that the current federal moratorium ends.

Brown said in a statement announcing the second extension:

"As we continue to see record high numbers of COVID-19 hospitalizations driven by the Delta surge, I am committed to ensuring that Oregonians have a warm, dry, safe place to live during this pandemic."

"Extending the temporary residential foreclosure moratorium another three months will prevent removal of Oregonians from their homes by foreclosure, which would result in serious health, safety, welfare, and financial consequences, and which would undermine key efforts to prevent spread of COVID-19."

People behind in their mortgage payments and facing foreclosure are advised to meet with housing counselors in their communities. They also will have access to \$90

million in a homeownership assistance fund, which is in its first stages. The Oregon Department of Housing and Community Services awaits guidance from the U.S. Treasury about the fund, which should be ready in the fall.

About 70% of Oregon mortgages are federally backed, according to the Federal Housing Finance Agency, which regulates mortgages. Its moratorium was scheduled to end June 30, but it was extended to July 31, and now, it's to Sept. 30.

Unlike the original state moratorium, which applied to all properties, House Bill 2009 passed by the 2021 Legislature applies only to a total of five residential properties per owner. Each property can contain no more than four units. Commercial property is excluded.

Foreclosures are separate from evictions of tenants, who still can seek rental assistance from the state housing agency and community action agencies. Under that program as of Aug. 11, 26,925 applications have been filed requesting \$195 million; 2,797 have been approved for a total of \$17 million. The state agency dashboard reported almost 10,000 more applications have not been completed.

The Legislature passed a separate bill (Senate Bill 278) that bars evictions from

being initiated for 60 days if tenants show proof they have applied for rental assistance. That aid started with \$200 million in state funds, but the federal government boosted it by more than \$200 million after Congress passed President Joe Biden's pandemic recovery plan.

Multnomah County has a separate ordinance setting a 90-day period.

State housing officials said Aug. 4 they have contracted

with an outside vendor, Public Partnerships LLC based in Boston, to work on reducing the huge backlog of applications from Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties. They account for almost 60% of total applications statewide.

Under a different law (Senate Bill 282), tenants have until Feb. 28, 2022, to pay past-due rent from April 1, 2020, through June 30 of this year without fear of eviction.

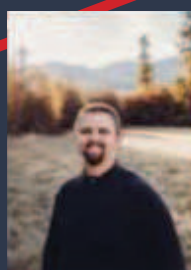
OPEN HOUSE

SUNDAY, AUGUST 22ND, 2021

12293 Bulger Flat Lane,
Haines, OR
1:00PM-3:00PM



Hosted by: Mitch Grove
light refreshment provides



MITCH GROVE
-REALTOR-

