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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

November 19, 2020

Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Santa Barbara County – request for indoor Church and Worship services

Dear Governor Newsom,

On behalf of the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors, I want to thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented global pandemic. The County of Santa Barbara has been working diligently to implement and be compliant with the State's Blueprint for a Safer Economy. The County in fact has been more restrictive than the State by continuing to prohibit private gatherings and adopting a local ordinance to impose administrative fines for non-compliance with health orders.

Prior to the nationwide and statewide surges in infection rates in mid-November, Santa Barbara County was in the red tier for eight weeks and very close to the orange tier, with a transmission rate of 4.3 (adjusted) per 100,000 residents and overall positivity rate of 1.8%, and doing better than surrounding counties in central and southern California. Prior to this change, our metrics for the Healthy Places Index were also faring well at 2.8. This was in part due to focused effort on outreach, resources and assistance through our Latinx and Indigenous Migrant COVID-19 Response Task Force, which includes over 140 participants and 60 community partners.

On November 16, 2020, the County reverted to the purple tier along with the 40 other counties, with a transmission rate of 7.1 (adjusted). At the Board of Supervisors meeting on November 17, 2020, the Board discussed the challenges of moving backwards, particularly for worship and church services, which are only allowed outdoors in the purple tier. The County's local health official articulated that indoor worship services are deemed higher risk than indoor shopping because services usually span longer periods of time, entail reduced movement and more engagement with others. Some Supervisors, like myself, urged continued prudence given the increasing transmission rates.

Given the importance of church and worship services in some residents' lives, and some churches desire to continue indoor services as we approach the winter weather, a majority of the Board asked that the County request the State amend its guidelines to allow indoor church and worship services for counties in the purple tier, consistent with retail guidelines. While I disagree with the majority's reasoning, especially given the surge in COVID-19 cases we are experiencing throughout the State, as Board Chair I am conveying the Board's request to you. In this latest surge of cases, it is also critical that the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) re-emphasize the difference in risk levels for various activities and explain what appear to be inconsistencies in the restrictions.

Thank you again for your leadership. We continue to work with the State on safely mitigating the pandemic and its impact on our community.

Sincerely,



Gregg Hart,
Chair, Board of Supervisors
County of Santa Barbara

cc: Assemblymember Monique Limón