

March 17, 2020

Governor Jay Inslee  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee:

We appreciate the leadership you've shown responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. We also would like to thank you for accessing the budget stabilization account to help defray costs that your local government partners have incurred in responding to the pandemic. We know the decisions you've made haven't been easy, and yesterday you made another difficult decision, one that will have significant impacts to residents throughout the state.

Workers and businesses in travel, tourism, entertainment, hospitality and restaurant industries have been disproportionately impacted by the government response to this public health emergency. We write you today to request a number of temporary policy changes that will help mitigate the financial impact to employees and employers throughout the state.

We recognize that Washington state has an exemplary unemployment insurance system. However, in these uncharted waters, we think there are a number of actions that can be taken to help the system offer more timely and substantive assistance to employees:

- Waiver of the one-week qualification delay;
- Waiver of the minimum hours worked requirement;
- Relax the reporting requirements for job searches imposed to secure benefits;
- Enhancement of benefits, similar to what the state did coming out of the great recession over a decade ago.

We understand that some of these actions may require federal government participation and support. As with any public facing government system, people will only use the unemployment insurance system if they know it exists, know how to apply, and know where to turn for help. With an unprecedented number of individuals who will be out of work due to the COVID-19 response, we ask you to consider taking action to deal with this surge:

- Add unemployment insurance help line capacity, and staff the telephone help lines 24 hours a day, seven days a week;
- Simplify the benefit application process;
- Expand funding for organizations that assist individuals in applying for benefits; and
- Make assistance available to workers in the gig economy who are not on traditional payroll programs.

Even with changes like those suggested above, the magnitude of this crisis calls for a response more robust than our traditional safety net programs can provide in their current form. We suggest that the state strongly consider a significant expansion of existing programs like Housing and Essential Needs (“HEN”) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (“TANF”) to provide immediate, unrestricted direct cash assistance to workers who have lost jobs as a result of government action to protect public health. We should broaden the qualifications for impacted workers and increase the grant amounts substantially. We need to put cash in workers’ wallets as quickly as the necessary public health orders have taken it away.

We also recognize that our small business owners will be disproportionately impacted during this pandemic. We strongly support exploring ways to immediately mitigate the economic impacts of the COVID-19 response to our small businesses, to potentially include a business and occupation tax holiday for small businesses; delayed collection of B&O taxes without interest or penalty for said businesses; and extension of deadlines and waivers of interest and penalties for real and personal property taxes.

We also strongly suggest development of a small business grant program, modeled after the city of Seattle’s program, to help small businesses devastated by the COVID-19 response.

These are trying times. We believe in the strength and resiliency of the residents of this state, and we know we will get through this epidemic. However, employees who have been laid off can’t pay rent or buy groceries with strength and resiliency. Our residents need immediate financial assistance to help themselves and their loved ones weather this storm. We hope you and your administration will consider implementing the policy changes outlined in this letter. We stand with you in this fight.



Rod Dembowski  
King County Councilmember  
District One



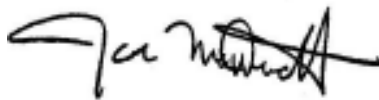
Girmay Zahilay  
King County Councilmember  
District Two



Jeanne Kohl-Welles  
King County Councilmember  
District Four



Dave Upthegrove  
King County Councilmember  
District Five



Joe McDermott  
King County Councilmember  
District Eight



M. LORENA GONZÁLEZ  
President, Seattle City Council  
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Lisa Herbold  
Seattle City Council  
District One



Tammy J. Morales  
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Dan Strauss  
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District Six



Amy Ockerlander  
Mayor  
City of Duvall



Matt Larson  
Mayor  
City of Snoqualmie



Carol Benson  
Mayor  
Black Diamond



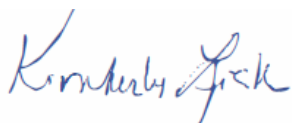
Angela Birney  
Mayor  
City of Redmond



Dave Baker  
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City of Kenmore



Benson Wong  
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