



April 7, 2020

State of Alaska
Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development
Commissioner Julie Anderson
investigations@alaska.gov

Dear Commissioner Anderson,

I am writing this letter to you in my capacity as Vice president and Chief Medical Officer for SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC). As Incident Commander, I have led our organization's response and planning for the COVID-19 pandemic in all 27 communities served by SEARHC across the Southeast region. As a physician, I have practiced in Sitka and other communities for more than 20 years, and I have a detailed familiarity with our communities, their economy, and their people.

As we have responded to the current crisis, I have been heartened greatly by our governor's response. Governor Dunleavy's COVID-19 Health Mandates have been put in place in an effort to slow the spread of the virus and prevent our health care system from being overwhelmed. SEARHC, a regional healthcare provider, has been proactively planning a response ahead of coronavirus reaching Southeast Alaska. Additionally, local community members have worked hard to flatten the curve and follow all state and local mandates. Due to their diligence, we have yet to have a confirmed case of COVID-19 in Sitka.

Through Sitka's Emergency Unified Command structure, we have been made aware that seafood processing company Silver Bay Seafoods plans to relocate 450 workers from the lower 48 and Mexico to Sitka for seasonal fish processing. I have reviewed their mitigation plan in detail, and while it may appear reasonable, in its present form, it is contradictory to medical reason.

Specifically, these workers can't travel to Alaska without traveling through areas with high levels of COVID-19. It is naive to believe that all 450 of their workers will self-quarantine for 14 days before embarking for Alaska. It is unrealistic to plan quarantine for 14 days after arrival in a bunkhouse due to shared sleeping quarters. The medical reality is that despite best efforts, if this plan is enacted, the virus will come to Sitka and spread to these workers and the community, creating a strain on limited medical resources intended for the entire region.

Due to this crisis, hundreds of Sitkans have been laid off and are in need of employment to support their families. There is a potential workforce available in the community to fill the needs of the employer.

Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) requests the State complete an additional review of the Silver Bay Seafoods Travel Plan and Policy. We are calling attention to the plan because we do not believe the mitigation submittal can safely be implemented and would be in violation of Health Mandate 012.



At this time, SEARHC believes that the possible effects of 450 travelers to the City and Borough of Sitka could be catastrophic. We do not believe this is a risk that the State of Alaska should allow at this time without significant changes to the plan of mitigation.

Sincerely,

Elliot Bruhl M.D.

Vice President and Chief Medical Officer

Cc:

Governor Michael Dunleavy

Adam Crum, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services

Dr. Anne Zink, Chief Medical Officer

Senator Bert Stedman

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

Mayor Gary Paxton

John Leach, Municipal Administrator, City and Borough of Sitka