

June 23, 2020

Gavin Newsom, Governor, State of California
1303 10th St., Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

The Del Norte Healthcare District and the Del Norte County Public Health Officer appreciate your leadership to help contain the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The district and the Public Health Officer jointly sent you a letter on March 25, 2019 requesting an order prohibiting inmate transfers. The County Public Health Officer followed up with another letter to you dated April 30, 2020.

In our letter we expressed this district's concern was that CDCR was transferring inmates into Pelican Bay State Prison ("PBSP") from other prisons that have shown positive cases of COVID.

Our concern was also directed toward those working for the state at PBSP and those C.O.s that are transporting the prisoners to PBSP from out of the area. PBSP staff are free to come and go around the community after potentially being exposed to COVID-19 at the prison. We have now had at least one positive case of a Correctional Officer working at PBSP.

We understand that our request to desist from prisoner transports has not risen to the level that you feel it is necessary to restrain them. We are informed that they are now being quarantined after transport. However, the personnel who are dealing with these quarantined inmates are not being given Personal Protective Equipment. They are requested to wear masks that protect the prisoners against staff but PBSP Correctional Officers are not being provided with N-95 masks to protect themselves – even those who are directly tending to *quarantined* inmates.

Two groups of new C.O.s have been accepted from the CDCR academy where those receiving training have tested positive.

This community went from 4 cases to 40 cases in two weeks. Although we are officially at 49 cases wastewater testing demonstrates that at least 180 COVID infected persons using the city wastewater system. Although PBSP officials are attempting to quarantine inmates arriving at PBSP, there is no quarantine of either inmates or correctional officers during the transfer. This practice places inmates, correctional officers and our community at risk. **Thus, this healthcare district once again requests that you issue an executive order to: 1) Stop the transfer of inmates into PBSP. 2) Provide adequate PPE to PBSP staff. 3) Refrain from transferring staff into the prison from areas that have incidences of COVID-19. 4) Upgrade PBSP's wastewater facility to have the capability to detect COVID-19 within the exterior boundaries of the prison and implement use of that technology.**

We feel compelled to once again point out that Del Norte County is uniquely vulnerable to COVID-19. Our region is a federally designated Health Professional Shortage Area, served by a single small hospital located 90 minutes over mountain roads to the next closest hospital. The Del Norte County Public Health Officer confirmed hospital staffing may be unable to meet surge capacity in the event of a coronavirus outbreak.

Hospital patients in need of higher care are typically transferred via air ambulance, but the local air ambulance provider is not equipped to transfer COVID-19 patients. Thus, a COVID-19 outbreak at PBSP could quickly overwhelm our local healthcare resources while interfering with patient transfers to outside facilities.

We understand the California Department of Corrections seeks flexibility in housing inmates and protecting its staff. But the consequences of a COVID-19 outbreak in an isolated, medically underserved community are dire.

Please contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

Kevin Caldwell, M.D.
Chair, Del Norte Healthcare District

cc: Gerry Hemmingsen, Chair, Del Norte County Board of Supervisors

cc: Blake Inscore, Mayor, Crescent City

cc: Joseph Fick, M.D., Chief Medical Executive, CDCR, Vacaville, CA

cc: Physicians Organizing Committee