



April 15, 2020

The Honorable Michael J., Dunleavy
Governor of the State of Alaska
Office of the Governor
550 West 7th Avenue
Suite 1700
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Re: COVID-19 Pandemic and 2020 Bristol Bay Fishing Season

Dear Governor Dunleavy:

We are writing on behalf of the Bristol Bay Working Group, representing the Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation, Bristol Bay Native Association, Bristol Bay Native Corporation, Bristol Bay Housing Authority, & the United Tribes of Bristol Bay, concerning a matter of critical public concern. That matter is the risk posed to all Alaskans, and especially to the residents and the healthcare workers of the Bristol Bay region, presented by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the rapidly approaching 2020 fishing season.

Bristol Bay Fishery Involves Substantial In-migration of Non-Residents. As you know, each year the Bristol Bay fishery swells the population by thousands of individuals who travel to the region. These individuals arrive to fill seasonal jobs as fishermen, industry support personnel, and processing workers, and they travel here literally from every corner of the country and the globe. This in-migration of workers results in the highest increase and concentration of population of any rural community and any fishery in Alaska.

Health Risks of Arriving Fisheries Workers. During the past several weeks, since the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have learned that individuals infected with the virus can be asymptomatic, but still highly contagious. We know, as well, that workers in Alaska's fishing industry unavoidably work in close quarters on fishing boats, tender vessels, and processing facilities. It is impossible for these individuals or their employers to comply with the recommendations for "social distancing" and personal hygiene of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and your administration. The Bristol Bay fishery, by its very nature, requires that individuals engage in exactly the opposite actions and behavior as are recommended by all public health experts and officials. As a result, the risk of transmission of the virus in this environment is not just high -- it is certain.

Regional Lack of Necessary Infrastructure. Bristol Bay is one of the most rural areas of the most rural State in the country. It is not an overstatement to say that there likely is not a worse place in the United States to be stricken with the COVID-19 virus than rural Alaska. Kakanak Hospital is a Critical Access Hospital licensed for 16 beds, a 5-bed Emergency Department, and no ICU capability. The two ventilators available are not equipped with viral

filters and cannot be safely used for COVID-19 treatment. There are only four negative pressure rooms and no respiratory therapy support. Ironically, but not to be taken lightly, this hospital served as an orphanage due to the 1919 flu epidemic. The nearest ICU is 300 miles or more away.

The human medical resources in the region are as constrained as the physical resources. While the population of Bristol Bay swells in the summer, the population of physicians, nurses and healthcare workers does not. In the event of a viral outbreak, the region is hopelessly ill-equipped and unprepared to manage the care of a large volume of highly contagious and seriously ill individuals. These individuals, who will need 24/7 intensive care and support from highly skilled and trained medical professionals, will quickly overwhelm our health care facilities, supplies and workforce. This puts our our health care workers and communities at greater risk while denying these resources to the residents of the region's twenty-eight communities that rely on Kakanak hospital as their lone source of healthcare.

The risks presented do not extend only to the arriving fisheries workers. Residents of Bristol Bay also will be at risk of infection, as well as the risk that their needs for other, non-COVID-19 medical care will be displaced or precluded by the urgency of providing care for individuals infected with the virus. The risks also extend beyond Bristol Bay residents. As we have seen, the COVID-19 virus is highly contagious and spreads rapidly; as a result, all Alaskans, from Barrow to Ketchikan, will be at risk. Without effective action by the state, these circumstances create the perfect recipe for a COVID-19 hot-spot and a medical and regional disaster that, in terms of the loss of human life, would dwarf the 1964 Earthquake or any past disaster in Alaska.

Responsibilities of the State and Required Actions. The State of Alaska has no higher or more critical duty than to protect its citizens. Indeed, the duty is constitutional, as the right to life is enshrined in Article I, Section 1 of the state constitution. In the face of the serious, unprecedented, and unique risks COVID-19 virus presents to the Bristol Bay community, the state has a duty to take all measures necessary to protect its citizens. Those measures include, at a minimum:

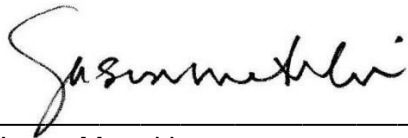
(1) a program of rigorous enforcement to ensure compliance with current CDC and state guidelines and recommendations, (2) pre-testing for the COVID-19 virus of all fisheries workers before they board a plane for the Bristol Bay region, (3) a mandatory follow-up COVID-19 test and 14-day quarantine for all arriving fisheries workers, (4) a program to ensure enforcement of and compliance with the quarantine, and (5) compliance with any additional medical protocols and guidelines as may be issued by the CDC or the state. *Please see Bristol Bay's detailed outline of recommended protocols attached to this letter.*

Our local municipality & medical facilities do not have the capacity to execute or enforce these critical measures, warranting swift and necessary action by the State of Alaska. **If these steps to protect human health and safety cannot or will not be taken, the state should close the Bristol Bay fishery for 2020.** The long-term cost of allowing a fishery to go forward would far outweigh the cost of forgoing one season. If the fishery is allowed to go forward without these measures, ignoring the warnings of public health experts and officials and the pleas of

Bristol Bay communities, the consequences will be devastating and generational. Spread of the COVID-19 virus and the resulting human, economic, and social consequences will not be the result of an Act of God, but will be the result of the state's failure to act and to fulfill its fundamental duties to its citizens.

Thank you for your attention to this most pressing and critical of issues. If we can provide additional information or assistance, please reach out to our point of contact, Norman VanVactor via phone at (907) 843-2508 or email at norm@bbedc.com.

With utmost urgency & concern,



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Bristol Bay Protocols for 2020 Salmon Season

To prioritize human health and safeguard our communities from the risk of catastrophic loss due to the COVID-19 crisis, the Bristol Bay Working Group supports the following protocols for 2020 operations of the commercial salmon fishing industry in Bristol Bay. Based on the COVID-19 virus information from the Center for Disease Control and the examples of the spread worldwide, the following are necessary measures for the health and safety of our region's people and all who work in Bristol Bay. This is our unified message that we will be conveying to our State Government. In addition, please honor the restrictions outlined in local municipal and tribal ordinances.

Applies to: All ports of entry into Bristol Bay communities (air, sea, land, etc.)

Pre-Arrival Criteria (traveling into Bristol Bay communities) :

- All "Essential Critical Infrastructure" workers & businesses associated with the commercial fishery will need to demonstrate that they are participants within an Industry COVID-19 Health Response Plan.
- Certified Health Providers Physical Exam conducted within a maximum of 48 hours of commencing transportation to Bristol Bay. **Minimum criteria for approved physical exam: Negative COVID-19 Test**

Upon Arrival:

- Individuals will be transported (via Industry Health Response Plan designated transport) directly from airport to destination of quarantine and remain in controlled quarantine until a follow-up negative COVID -19 test is confirmed (*within time range determined by medical protocol*).
- Any individuals within the confines of a community are subject to two health screenings per week (criteria for this screening is still being developed).
- Anyone with a State of Alaska Identification Card or Driver's license with a home address in Bristol Bay will conform to SOA travel requirements and their fishing company's Industry Health Response Plan.
- Post quarantine release, fishermen and seafood employees will abide by local municipal, tribal, & state ordinances and recommendations for healthy conduct and practices within the community.

Industry COVID-19 Health Response Plan will also include:

- Working with or contracting with approved health care providers for employees and fishermen pre-arrival & post-arrival screenings.
- Controlled transportation for employees and fishermen to quarantine locations.
- Logistical support services for employees and fishermen for quarantine period and post quarantine period.
- Weekly health screenings. *[to be defined by medical protocol]*
- In the event of COVID-related medical issues, industry is strongly encouraged to provide medical assistance to their employees and fishermen to supplement and support the *very limited capacity of local medical providers*.
 - If needed, industry will provide their own isolation facilities.
 - Industry will provide medical evacuation plans.

These protocols represent minimum elements which must be included in all Industry COVID-19 protocol plans to operate in Bristol Bay, effective immediately. Failure to comply by employees or fishermen will result in immediate termination of market and removal. Non-compliance by a company or business will result in significant consequences. As technology and conditions change, this protocol will be re-evaluated on an ongoing basis, but no later than 5/01/2020.

The Bristol Bay Working Group is open to discussions with Industry on potential options for controlled quarantine scenarios and or private charter transport directly into the community of operation. Since commercial fishing is deemed by the federal government as an "Essential Critical Infrastructure," we are committed to advocating in unison with the fishing industry for appropriate testing equipment and resources needed to meet these requirements.

We look forward to working with all sectors to ensure the health and safety of fishery participants and local communities is our first priority.