



NEW MEXICO BUSINESS COALITION

New Mexico, Let's Get Back to Business

A safe, sensible and incremental plan to get New Mexico back to work

New Mexico Business Coalition (NMBC) seeks to do what is best for our state and all of the people who live here. We love this state and care deeply about it both in regards to the health of our citizens and the health of our economy.

Governor Lujan Grisham was proactive in her desire to keep New Mexicans safe from the Corona virus and we are thankful for the low numbers of infection and deaths as compared to other states. Currently our state is in mandatory shut down of all nonessential businesses to protect against the spread of the COVID-19 virus. By the numbers, these practices have worked, but there is more to consider.

We believe that every business is essential, because every business offers an opportunity for people to provide for themselves and their families. Business operations allow people to continue with their lives' needs even if currently on a limited basis. In addition, businesses pay taxes that fund our roads, hospitals, and many other common and necessary functions of government.

To provide hope and a pathway forward for job providers and employees, a plan of action to transition to an 'open' economy needs to be formulated. NMBC has a suggested plan provided herein. First, however, let's recap where we are as a state and look at sound evidence that supports our recommendation to safely, sensibly and incrementally move our state forward to a place of opening businesses and recreational facilities.

Our businesses were shut down with virtually no notice, being told in the late afternoon that they would not reopen in the morning. There was no option, no discussion, and there was no time for planning. As a result, we have seen businesses announce that they would close permanently because they are financially unable to sustain the loss of income. Other businesses are in an extremely dangerous position and unsure if they will make it until they can reopen. Most businesses are scrambling to find funds to pay ongoing bills when there is no income and business owners are worried about their employees' wellbeing.

To date, we have over 90,000 New Mexicans unemployed and many are having significant problems obtaining unemployment benefits. This is putting a strain on their ability to provide for the immediate needs of their families. In addition, their debt is mounting because many are unable to make payments for rent, mortgages, vehicles,

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utilities and other ongoing expenses. There may be a reprieve from collections and evictions at this time, but it does not stop the need to pay those bills eventually.

Also troubling is that all ‘nonessential’ medical appointments have been stopped. Much of the problem with this lies in the definition of ‘nonessential’ because preventative diagnostic services should be considered ‘essential’. With a high incidence of cancer, screenings including mammograms, colonoscopies, MRIs, . . . etc. should be allowed to continue in order to save lives. The last thing we need is for New Mexicans to lose the opportunity for early detection of skin, breast or other cancers, and die sooner than necessary due to the lack of early detection.

Ironically, the decision to stop essentially all medical appointments, outside of emergencies and COVID-19 related issues, has meant virtually no revenue to sustain some hospitals and its staff. Lovelace Health System has reduced hours and pay for many employees.ⁱ In addition, the state is now planning to provide \$35 million to 35 facilities in order to keep them in business.ⁱⁱ

If we look at Taiwan, we see similarly low infection rates in a country just miles away from the original epicenter of COVID-19. Taiwan did not have a mandatory government shut down of businesses; rather it implemented a policy of individual responsibility along with transparency of information.ⁱⁱⁱ Likewise, Germany has taken a softer stance, with less stringent containment measures, yet it has fewer confirmed cases and significantly fewer deaths than Italy and Spain.^{iv}

New Mexico’s requirement for mandatory business closures have been clear; however, there was and still is no plan on how the state will remove the mandates for closure and allow businesses to reopen. NMBC recommends Governor Lujan Grisham formulate and publicize a plan with a timeframe to open New Mexico businesses again and we would like to help.

Looking at China where the virus began, it’s interesting to note that “just over two months after those first lockdowns in several Chinese cities, business has resumed in the country, with estimates of activity as high as 90% of pre-coronavirus levels.”^v

While an entire economy can be quickly shut down, we will not see most businesses immediately able to reopen, restaff and begin operating at the same capacity they employed prior to the shutdown. That is the reason we need a plan.

It is important to understand that at the time this proposal was drafted, New Mexico has not had a single death fully attributable to the virus. As of April 13, 2020, New Mexico has administered almost 29,000 tests resulting in 1,245 positive results of COVID-19. Positive results are less than 0.06 percent of New Mexico’s population, which is due largely to our low density population and adherence to the Governor’s mandates.

To date, we've had 26 virus-related deaths. While every life lost is unfortunate, those who have passed have had significant underlying health issues or been hospitalized for other reasons.

The **Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington** has again reduced the anticipated death rates related to COVID-19. The U.S. estimate is down from over 200,000 to 60,000 people through Aug. 4. The numbers for New Mexico are also down to 194 through late June — a 62 percent reduction from an earlier projection of 513 deaths in the state.^{vi}

Because we have good data and greater testing capabilities, we know that New Mexico is doing well in handling the crisis. Information from New York, Italy and other epicenters provide an excellent view of the time frame for community inception and peak. In these instances, we are dealing with facts, not projections. That is why modeling from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, which analyzes data from every state as well as other countries, should be trusted and utilized in projecting what is likely to happen in New Mexico. It is neither necessary nor good practice to isolate modeling for New Mexico while always highlighting extreme worse case scenarios.^{vii}

It is time to get back to business and let our people get back to providing for their families! This will help provide for New Mexican's mental and emotional health while still monitoring best practices for our physical wellbeing.

New Mexico Business Coalition's suggested plan for reopening businesses and other facilities is based on applicable research and what would be most prudent for our state.

This plan is safe, sensible and incremental in its approach and allows the Governor and her team to closely monitor progress as it is implemented.

Implementation guidelines to be used throughout the process of reopening the state would, of course, provide for monitoring of the virus for any significant increased spread. We understand that issues with COVID-19 will continue for some time; what we are suggesting is looking after other indicators of wellbeing, which includes their financial security, while still mitigating any significant dangers of the virus. Safe practices could include, but not be limited to:

- 1) A person who is positive or living with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, even if not showing symptoms, should not return to work until tested negative;
- 2) Elderly and/or those with significant health concerns, should continue to stay sheltered for at least an additional month;
- 3) Continue to maintain social distancing parameters of six feet clearance while at work, shopping or completing transactions;
- 4) All employees of any retail establishment should wear masks, especially those handling food, for at least another month or until the active threat of virus spread has subsided;

- 5) Continue to maintain smaller gatherings of up to 15 persons for at least another month or until the active threat of virus spread has subsided;
- 6) Customers and shoppers should be encouraged to wear masks;
- 7) Continue to protect our most vulnerable population in nursing homes by preventing in-person visits until the threat of virus spread has subsided.

As every new date and bench mark is met, progress with the virus spread can be monitored. It is understandable that the virus will not stop abruptly and there will be new cases and the unfortunate continuation of lost lives. But if business and life can start moving to a new normal state, that will help provide for the overall health of our people and our economy.

NMBC's suggestions to reopen New Mexico are as follows:

- 1) Identify all businesses that can operate under the same guidance currently in effect of a maximum 20 percent occupancy and utilizing masks and social distancing. Open these businesses immediately. Identification should be that every business is allowed to open with 20 percent occupancy and the above guidelines, unless there is a specific reason that operation poses a threat to the public.
- 2) Open outdoor recreational facilities with the same constraints as businesses. Again, identification should be that every recreational facility is allowed to open with 20 percent occupancy and the above guidelines, unless there is a specific reason that their operation poses a threat to the public. This will allow people and families positive enjoyment to help them stay mentally and emotionally healthy.
- 3) On May 4, 2020, almost two full weeks past the anticipated virus peak of April 22,^{viii} and 7.5 weeks past the initial declaration of a public health emergency, allow every business, government agency and outdoor recreational facilities to begin operating at 50 percent capacity.
- 4) On May 16, 2020, allow early voting to take place with the same protective gear and restrictions as used for businesses.
- 5) On May 18, 2020, two weeks past the initial opening and with no significant virus issues, increase all business, government and outdoor recreational facilities capacities to 75 percent. Begin opening indoor recreational facilities at 25 percent capacity.
- 6) On June 1, 2020, assuring that there are no significant virus issues, increase all business, government and outdoor recreational facilities capacities to 100 percent. Increase indoor recreational facilities to 50 percent capacity. Continue incrementally increasing indoor recreational facilities capacity until operating at 100 percent.
- 7) On June 2, 2020, allow the New Mexico primary election voting to take place.

NMBC recognizes that there are a lot of factors to consider. We encourage outreach from the Governor's office and would welcome the opportunity to consult with her and her staff in order to open New Mexico in the most efficient and safe way possible.

To Governor Lujan Grisham, we urge you to take quick action to help the great people of New Mexico as well as our economy. We look forward to hearing from you to work in partnership and/or seeing your swift action on next steps.

ⁱ Chris Ramirez, "Lovelace cuts pay, hours during COVID-19 crisis," (KOB Ch 4).

ⁱⁱ Dan Boyd, "NM coronavirus cases surge past 1K mark," (Albuquerque Journal, April 11, 2020), p. A5.

ⁱⁱⁱ Javier Caramés Sanchez and William Hongsong Wang, "Why Taiwan Hasn't Shut Down Its Economy," (Foundation for Economic Education, April 2, 2020).

^{iv} Markets and Economy, "Global economies: What we see ahead," (Vanguard, April 8, 2020).

^v Vanguard, Global economies: What we see ahead.

^{vi} Ryan Boetel and Matthew Reisen, "Health care workers brace for a surge," (Albuquerque Journal, April 12, 2020), p. A4.

^{vii} Dan Boyd and Dan McKay, "State will craft economic recovery plan," (Albuquerque Journal, April 10, 2020), p. A4.

^{viii} Dan McKay, "Fewer deaths in NM, US predicted," (Albuquerque Journal, April 9, 2020), p. A3