



State of New Mexico

Aug. 6, 2021

Dear New Mexico business leaders and commercial association executives,

We, the undersigned public officials representing New Mexicans in government all across our state, firmly believe the private sector has the power and opportunity to help forestall another unnecessary surge of COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations that may threaten to derail the progress New Mexicans have made in ending this period of public health upheaval. Thus, we write in unison to urge you in the strongest terms to consider implementing vaccination policies that will help ensure the state of New Mexico can continue to recover economically from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you know or may have heard, New Mexico's statewide new COVID-19 case rate, as of early August, has reached a six-month high. Infections, increasing sharply once again, are driven by the so-called Delta variant of the virus, which epidemiologists report is up to four times more infectious than the strains of COVID-19 our state has dealt with to this point. Unvaccinated New Mexicans bear the brunt of these potentially lethal infections: More than 9 of every 10 new COVID-19 infections in New Mexico since February have afflicted an unvaccinated individual, and 93 percent of the 2,500 New Mexicans who have been hospitalized with COVID-19 since February were unvaccinated.

Perhaps most glaring: We have lost 537 more New Mexicans to this virus in the past six months, and 527 of them -- or 98 percent -- were unvaccinated.

Although these datapoints underscore the incredible efficacy of the vaccines as well as the risk to unvaccinated individuals, they are of concern for vaccinated and unvaccinated populations alike. Federal public health officials report that the virus may mutate among unvaccinated populations, creating so-called "breakthrough" cases, endangering the immunity the vaccines provide -- and jeopardizing the fragile progress we have all made toward resuming our normal social and economic lives.

In short, the pandemic is not over. New Mexico was fast out of the gate with its vaccination distribution program, leading the United States in several key metrics and creating a foundation for economic growth, regrowth and opportunity. Indeed, in the most recent quarterly statewide economic report, matched taxable gross receipts were the highest they have been since December 2019, demonstrating a surge in economic activity across all 33 counties in our state unseen since the onset of the pandemic. This momentum, however, is not guaranteed; we must protect it and work to create an environment where consumers and workers feel safe. Vaccine resistance -- often fueled by misinformation and propaganda -- stands in the way. We need to finish the job. And we need your help.

As infections increase amid persistent vaccine hesitancy, elevating health risks for even vaccinated New Mexicans, we expect that lingering issues around workforce re-entry may worsen. Consumer hesitancy may once again rise, blunting the commercial regrowth that has begun to take root across various economic sectors in our state. In a worst-case scenario, New Mexico and the region -- indeed the entire United States -- may backslide into another cycle of hospitalizations and death.

Vaccination policies in the public and private sectors can serve to prevent these negative outcomes. Government and community institutions across New Mexico -- among numerous other examples in other states -- have taken steps forward in this regard. The state of New Mexico recently required that all employees be either vaccinated or submit to weekly COVID-19 testing. Some private sector entities in New Mexico have already followed suit. The University of New Mexico, meanwhile, issued a requirement that all faculty, staff, and students be vaccinated as soon as possible and no later than the end of September.

Implementation of these policies has not been and will not be resistance-free. Misinformation campaigns have been persuasive -- and to tragic ends. But the vaccines work, and vaccine incentives and requirements will be effective in increasing immunity, ensuring the continued collective efficacy of the vaccines and reducing health and public safety risks.

Given trends in other states and other countries, we expect these sorts of requirements to become significantly more commonplace in the coming weeks as governments and businesses recognize the severe and imminent economic risk of continued vaccine resistance. A willingness on the part of private sector leaders to take the initiative here in New Mexico will keep your workforce safer, boost consumer confidence and help guarantee that our steady economic progress is not needlessly endangered or reversed.

As you know, New Mexico's hospital capacity cannot withstand a sudden barrage of serious infections. As government leaders, we are willing to continue to make difficult choices to protect the constituents we have been elected to serve. We ask for help in creating an environment in our state where those difficult choices need not be made -- and where New Mexico families and workers can resume their lives, socially and economically, with confidence about their safety.

The COVID-19 vaccines are accessible and free. And they are effective. Requiring vaccination of your workforce -- and/or requiring proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test of the patrons who visit and support your business -- is within your right as an employer. Implementing that sort of policy to help New Mexico finally end this pandemic is within your power as a community leader.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham; Lt. Gov. Howie Morales; U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich; U.S. Sen. Ben Ray Luján; U.S. Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez; U.S. Rep. Melanie Stansbury; Senate Majority Leader Peter Wirth; Sen. Gerald Ortiz y Pino, chair of the Senate Health and Public Affairs Committee; Sen. Bill Tallman, vice chair of the Senate Health and Public Affairs

Committee; Sen. Brenda McKenna, member of the Senate Health and Public Affairs Committee; Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez, member of the Senate Health and Public Affairs Committee; Sen. Liz Stefanics, member of the Senate Health and Public Affairs Committee; Rep. Deborah Armstrong, chair of the House Health and Human Services Committee; Rep. Joanne Ferrary, vice chair of the House Health and Human Services Committee; Rep. Brittney Barreras, member of the House Health and Human Services Committee; Rep. Karen Bash, member of the House Health and Human Services Committee; Rep. Marian Mathews, member of the House Health and Human Services Committee; Rep. Roger Montoya, member of the House Health and Human Services Committee; Rep. Elizabeth “Liz” Thomson, member of the House Health and Human Services Committee; Commissioner Adriann Barboa of Bernalillo County; Commissioner Debbie O’Malley of Bernalillo County; Commissioner Charlene Pyskoty of Bernalillo County; Commissioner Steven Michael Quezada of Bernalillo County; Doña Ana County Commissioner Shannon Reynolds; Santa Fe County Commissioner Anna Hansen; Mayor Daniel R. Barrone of Taos; Mayor Peter Nieto of Mountainair; and Mayor Alan Webber of Santa Fe.