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State of Alaska, *EX OFFICIO*



February 5, 2021

The Honorable Michael J. Dunleavy
Governor of Alaska
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Governor Dunleavy:

On behalf of the more than 600 members of the Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA), we would like to share our continued thanks to you and the team at the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) for your efforts to keep Alaskans safe and businesses open. We recognize the challenges you and your administration are navigating as we combat the spread of this devastating virus and appreciate all you are doing for our state.

Alaska's tourism industry remains committed to keep our visitors, our teams, and our communities safe. We support Alaska's testing requirements. Furthermore, we have developed standards for, and plan to amplify, adherence to COVID-19 best practices (masking, social distancing, hand washing etc.) by businesses and visitors. We also support communities' initiatives to impose their own restrictions based on COVID incidences and access to medical resources. We are encouraged by DHSS data showing non-resident travel remains an extremely low source of COVID-19 transmission in our state.

We would like to express our continued concern, however, surrounding the language related to "strict social distancing" upon arrival. Further, in light of the recent announcement by Transport Canada which bans cruise travel through February 28, 2022, it has become more critical than ever to remove confusing guidance and restrictions which are barriers to potential travelers to Alaska.

[Health Order 06: International and Interstate Travel](#) states "All travelers with negative results from the arrival test must follow strict social distancing for five days after arrival into Alaska or until they leave Alaska, whichever occurs first."

This is not only discouraging travel to Alaska, but the definition also provided for strict social distancing in the health order describes an unattainable experience. Our members business owners are reporting potential visitors are reluctant to book travel or are cancelling reservations because of this language.

Typically, independent visitors, individuals or small groups, spend five to seven 7 days in Alaska. A five-day strict social distancing requirement would consume most, if not all, of their planned itinerary. Anecdotally, few visitors who arrive in-state are aware of this directive. Enforcement of this section of the order is challenging at best.

The health order and language is effectively jeopardizing the survival of small businesses as they struggle through this winter and upcoming summer tourism seasons during the pandemic.

Conversely, [Hawai'i](#), which has a similar pre-travel testing requirement but no social distancing requirement, welcomed 1.2 million travelers since mid-October, while maintaining the lowest average daily case count per capita and second lowest total case count in the country.

Alaska could similarly encourage safe travel to our state. To help our struggling businesses and welcome visitors to our communities, we recommend the following:

- Amend Health Order 06 language related to **“strict” social distancing to “strongly encouraged.”**
- **Update out-of-date and misleading FAQs** and other resources on state websites to reflect the revised language.
- **Consider updating Alaska’s existing traveler portal to include an app-based system for visitors to submit regular updates** during the 5-day period (as connectivity allows) or provide information only if symptoms arise rather than require social distancing mandates.

Now more than ever, Alaska’s tourism businesses need help in saving their livelihoods, and the jobs they provide to thousands of Alaskans. We need your continued help in making planning a trip to Alaska as uncomplicated, and as safe, as possible. Clarifying the social distancing language in Health Order 06 would improve compliance by visitors and Alaskan residents alike, while supporting Alaska’s need to limit COVID-19 infections. It will help bring visitors back to our naturally socially distanced wide-open spaces.

We know Alaska’s tourism industry looks vastly different this winter and will look especially different during the high-volume summer season. With a traditional cruise season now more uncertain than ever, large group travel restricted, and highway crossings closed at the Canadian border, our industry will rely even more on travelers flying to Alaska.

Thank you, Governor Dunleavy, for your continued attention and support of industry.

Sincerely,



Sarah Leonard
ATIA President & CEO



Bill Pedlar, Knightly Tours
Chair, ATIA Board of Directors

cc: Lt. Governor Kevin Meyer
Ben Stevens, Chief of Staff
Commissioner Adam Crum, DHSS