

September 2, 2020

The Honorable Phil Serna, Chair  
Sacramento County Board of Supervisors  
700 H Street, Suite 1450  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Management of the COVID-19 Crisis**

The Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) has been deeply concerned about recent revelations of how Sacramento County's CARES Act money was appropriated. We know that the issue was far more complex than portrayed in the press, and that the Board of Supervisors has made every effort to understand exactly what happened and why. The Board has recently appropriated an additional \$45 million to the Public Health Division, and it is clear that you are committed to addressing the current and future needs of our County spawned by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It seems evident, however, that more needs to be done. We hope you will consider the following:

**1. Broaden the focus on the COVID-19 pandemic**

It should be very clear by now that COVID-19 is far more than a respiratory disease pandemic. Obviously, there are the immediate issues of acute illness and stress on the hospital systems. There are also long-term medical consequences and the need for expensive rehabilitation. Many citizens have lost their medical insurance, and the future stress on Medicaid will be immense. There has been widespread job loss, and many of those jobs have disappeared forever. Job retraining will be necessary. With loss of income, rent and mortgage payments have and will become extraordinarily difficult. An eviction crisis looms. There is widespread food insecurity, and your recent grant to the Sacramento Food Bank only begins to address the needs in that area. There is a tremendous need for daycare, most severe for disadvantaged essential workers. The change to distance learning has uncovered problems of access and of uneven quality of education. The emotional stress on both young and old has increased demand on an already inadequate mental health system. And there are many other consequences.

**2. There should be well-coordinated central planning**

The problems created or exacerbated by the pandemic are profound and will have long-term consequences. They include many areas typically managed by governmental agencies: Health Services; Child, Family and Adult Services; Human Assistance; Mental Health; Economic Development; Environmental Management, schools, and others. If it does not already exist, **there should be a clearly visible central planning group** made up of leaders from all the agencies. This group should work closely with State planners.

### **3. Communication and transparency should be improved**

In addition to problem-solving, key goals of the central planning group should be communication and transparency. Actions of this group should be shared regularly with the press and the public. Some of the Supervisors send out periodic electronic updates to their constituents. Following that model, we believe there should be weekly or biweekly communications sent to every household in the County, as well as to the press. The public needs to know that our leaders understand the everyday stresses caused by the pandemic, and are taking action.

### **4. There needs to be accountability**

We understand that funding of COVID-19 expenditures may come from various sources - CARES Act, FEMA, State grants, General Fund, etc. Nonetheless, we believe that all expenditures targeted to the various aspects of this crisis should be itemized. It is important that the citizens of Sacramento County understand how their elected officials have addressed these uncertain times.

### **5. Support the Public Health Division**

The Public Health staff continues to track and respond to the many traditional, long-term public health needs of the County. COVID-19 has put unprecedented stress on this Division, and that stress is not letting up. Please seriously consider additional staff and resources to ease the burden.

In reality, Sacramento County government is often “invisible” to our citizens. They don’t think of government until something “goes wrong.” But, in this time of crisis, government must step forward and take proactive, visible steps to ease the burdens on our communities. This pandemic has resulted in a web of serious, interrelated problems. We hope you will take a holistic, hands-on approach to its management, and effectively communicate that work to the public.

Thank you for your consideration,

Farla Kaufman, PhD, MSc, MSc  
Chair, Public Health Advisory Board