

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 1, 2020

The Honorable Jay Inslee
Governor of Washington
416 14th Avenue Southwest
Olympia, Washington 98504

Dear Governor Inslee,

Thank you for your continued leadership during the COVID-19 crisis. We write to urge you to designate residential construction as an “essential” activity in our state in the face of this crisis. The guidance you released on March 25, 2020 regarding the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” proclamation states this construction sector is “not considered to be an essential activity.” However, we believe our state must do everything in its power to not further exacerbate the housing affordability and homelessness crisis facing Washington state. In light of the Department of Homeland Security’s recent updated guidance listing residential construction as “essential critical infrastructure,” we believe the residential construction sector must be designated as an essential activity.

As you are aware, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) executes the Secretary of Homeland Security’s authorities to secure critical infrastructure. In collaboration with federal agencies, State and local governments, and the private sector, CISA has developed an “Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce” advisory list intended to assist State, local, and tribal officials as they work to protect their communities. On March 28, 2020, CISA released its second version with an update of this guidance to include residential construction. We believe this guidance should be consulted as the State works to ensure the continuity of functions critical to public health and safety as well as economic security.

We agree with you that the safety and well-being of every Washingtonian is our top priority, and that we must continue to work together to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The Construction Industry Safety Coalition (CISC) – dedicated to the workplace safety and health of construction workers across the country – has provided extensive guidance to employers and employees in its “COVID-19 Exposure Prevention, Preparedness, and Response Plan.” The plan includes limitations on the number of workers for a single jobsite and resources on how to prevent worker exposure to the virus, cleaning and disinfecting procedures to be taken on the jobsite for protection, and protective workplace practice controls to be used by workers across the industry. Taken in conjunction with U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) workplace guidance for measures in response to the virus, including following social distancing procedures and keeping personal space to at least six feet, construction industry workers can play an active role in helping stop the

spread of COVID-19 while continuing to serve as the backbone of this vital sector of our state's economy.

We also agree with you that we must mitigate the economic impacts of COVID-19. According to the Associated General Contractors (AGC) of America, more than 222,000 Washingtonians work in our state's construction industry. A 2019 report from the Building Industry of Washington (BIAW) found the total economic impact of constructing 24,000 single-family homes in Washington in 2018 included the creation of more than 103,000 jobs, spurred \$2.2 billion in tax revenue for state and local governments, and provided \$8.4 billion in family wages for Washingtonians. A stoppage of residential construction will have profound ripple effects that will reverberate throughout our economy.

According to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), 26 governors of states with statewide "Stay at Home" orders have all designated construction as "essential." This includes our neighboring states of Oregon, Idaho, and Montana, in addition to California – which is experiencing a similar influx of COVID-19 cases as Washington. The Seattle Times reports of your construction guidance that "[n]early all construction" continues to be nonessential activity under the memorandum and that it exempts "only a very few categories of construction."

We believe our state can continue to take proactive measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 while ensuring impacts on the homebuilding construction sector does not further exacerbate the housing affordability and homelessness crisis facing our state. We urge you to follow suit of the majority of states with statewide "Stay at Home" orders and include this vital sector in the list of essential activities.

We remain committed to continuing to work with you in order to best ensure families and communities across our state remain resilient through this crisis. Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress