

STATE CAPITOL
ROOM 5108
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814
TEL. (916) 651-4007

DISTRICT OFFICE
51 MORAGA WAY, SUITE 2
ORINDA, CA 94563
TEL. (925) 258-1176

SENATOR.GLAZER@SENATE.CA.GOV

California State Senate

SENATOR
STEVEN M. GLAZER
SEVENTH SENATE DISTRICT



CHAIR
BUSINESS, PROFESSIONS &
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
SELECT COMMITTEE ON
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COMMITTEES
AGRICULTURE
EDUCATION
GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
INSURANCE

Gov. Gavin Newsom
State Capitol
Sacramento, Ca 95814

June 26, 2020

Dear Gov. Newsom,

I am writing to ask you to take immediate action to protect the health and safety of California's most vulnerable residents as you and county health officers move to reopen the economy.

This action is urgently necessary because it has become apparent that Californians do not understand that the shelter-in-place order remains in effect for these populations, placing them at great risk. And as the virus begins to spread rapidly among younger people, many of whom are asymptomatic, the risk of them infecting elders and other vulnerable people is becoming even more of a cause for concern.

Your executive order and public health order of March 19, 2020, ordered all California residents to remain sheltered in place except for essential work and for life-sustaining errands such as grocery shopping and health care, when those could not be done from home. You also released a "roadmap" that included four stages of reopening, and this plan said that seniors and medically vulnerable individuals should remain sheltered in place until we reached Stage 4.

Although no county in California has yet been cleared to move to Stage 4, the rapid re-opening of restaurants, bars, retail stores, shopping malls and personal care services has sent the message that the shelter in place order has ended for everyone, as long as people comply with social distancing practices and your order that masks be worn indoors and outside when distancing is not possible.

My staff did an audit of major news media coverage for a two week period in June as the reopening hit full stride. In 253 articles published on COVID-19, including 53 that focused on the reopening, we found only seven references to the need for medically vulnerable people to remain at home. And none of these references stated explicitly that your shelter-in-place order remained in effect.

Guidance issued by the California Department of Public Health may also be adding to the misunderstanding over this issue. In the guidelines for the reopening of non-essential retail stores, for

example, shop managers are encouraged to provide dedicated shopping hours for seniors and those who are medically vulnerable. The same guidance is given to operators of shopping malls, strip malls and swap meets.

But this guidance contradicts the still-in-effect order for seniors and vulnerable people to remain at home except for essential activities. In addition, your guidance for hair salons, fitness centers and other personal services does not even mention that vulnerable people should not be visiting these establishments at all. Is it any wonder that people are confused?

I urge you to use your own public appearances to remind people that these populations remain under an order to stay at home, and I implore you to do the following:

--Modify your administration's guidance to non-essential industries so that the owners and managers of these establishments understand that seniors and the medically vulnerable should not be working in or visiting these workplaces, stores and service providers.

--Add to your order to require these establishments to post signage warning seniors and vulnerable people that it is not safe to enter those premises and reminding them that they remain subject to your shelter-in-place order until we reach Stage 4 of the reopening process.

--Expand the wrap-around services the state provides to seniors and medically vulnerable people so that they can comply with the shelter-in-place order. This should include a much more expansive meal delivery program and a program to ensure that all people can receive medications without leaving the home. Finally, I urge you to provide personal protective equipment to our in-home supportive services workforce to protect these essential workers and their clients.

Without these actions and others to protect our seniors and medically vulnerable people, I fear that COVID-19 infections, which have disproportionately affected these populations, will only grow worse, and more Californians will needlessly become ill and die.

Sincerely,

Steve Glazer