



MEDIA RELEASE

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“Commissioner Vicki Baker and Local Mayors Meet with Governor to Discuss COVID-19 Pathway Forward for Yakima County”

YAKIMA, WA - Yakima County Commissioner Vicki Baker, along with City of Yakima Mayor Patricia Byers, Selah Mayor Sherry Raymond, Sunnyside Mayor Francisco Guerrero with City Manager Martin Casey, and Union Gap City Manager Arlene Fisher met with Washington Governor Jay Inslee Tuesday afternoon in the Yakima Valley College courtyard to discuss Yakima County’s challenges in combatting the spread of COVID-19 and the economic impacts of remaining in Phase One.

“An indefinite stall in Phase One is not having the intended effect of reducing COVID-19 transmission here and presents other dangers to the wellbeing of our community,” Commissioner Baker said.

“We asked to reopen our local businesses, while working to control the virus spread. The Governor agreed that we must find a way to do both things simultaneously. He understands that we are feeding the nation, and that our people cannot remain stuck in Phase One without hope.”

The mayors in attendance amplified those remarks and added that local community landmark businesses are on the brink of permanent closure.

Mayor Byers talked about the broader picture of community health that included psychological, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects, as well as physical. "Our community is suffering in every aspect right now." She said, “We need life and hope that allowing our small businesses to reopen safely will bring.”

"I was encouraged that the Governor appeared far more intent in hearing our concerns about the need to reopen our businesses. Our small businesses should have been essential and open from the beginning. They have the ability to monitor and maintain safe practices." Mayor Byers said.

The Mayor also talked about the large community wide masking campaign underway with collaborative efforts of the City of Yakima, the county, the Chamber of Commerce, Yakima County Development Association, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Yakima Valley Mall, and others. Mayor Byers reported the City of Yakima provided tens of thousands of masks this week, distributed through 16 major grocery outlets. Additionally, masks, hand sanitizer and educational materials are being delivered to priests and ministers who are trusted leaders of our Latino community.

"My challenge to the Governor was this: he asked me to commit to masking in public when I cannot socially distance, and to bring a resolution to Yakima City Council that recommended all our residents do the same. I have done those things. So, what I want from the Governor is to open our small businesses now... today."

Commissioner Baker added, "Reopening services and businesses in our county will allow residents to stay local and will reduce travel from Yakima County to other areas, which will help to reduce the spread of COVID-19 beyond the county lines."

Commissioner Baker noted significant resources have been committed to COVID-19 response at the local level:

- Yakima County's Emergency Management team has distributed 1 million pieces of PPE across the County.
- Yakima County devoted \$2.8 million in CARES funding to small business relief.
- Information campaigns are being deployed.
- Taskforces stand ready to help businesses immediately implement reopening guidelines for the health and safety of their employees and customers.

"Today I asked the Governor to join our local efforts by committing funds and other resources." Commissioner Baker said. "Everyone at the table today wants the same thing: a healthy community and a path forward for Yakima County."

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