

State of
Washington
House of
Representatives



January 22, 2021

The Governor Jay Inslee
P.O. Box 40200
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Gov. Inslee:

Our communities, state and nation continue to navigate through uncertain times.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an immense disruption to our state's economy. The continuous restrictions have devastated thousands of businesses, many have closed indefinitely.

You are certainly aware of the impacts facing our employers and employees. We are contacting you with our concerns about the state's handling and approach to fining and penalizing employers who may potentially be in violation of new and changing rules, guidance, and proclamations due to this unprecedented pandemic.

State agencies need a "how can we help you succeed" approach, instead of "this is a violation, you will be fined and penalized." The state needs to demonstrate a willingness to assist our employers and jobmakers during this critical economic time. Many employers have been faced with having to make drastic, costly changes to their operations with no way to recoup these costs through consumer price increases. They are doing the best they can for their employees, customers, and communities. Not only is their livelihood on the line, but the livelihoods of their employees and the economic support they provide their communities.

It has also been troubling to see private sector employers fined and penalized for how they are trying to manage through this unprecedented time, while at the same time some state agencies have struggled managing caseloads, providing services, responding to constituents in a timely manner and preventing fraud, but have faced no financial consequences and actually received more taxpayer money and resources during this pandemic. Yes, we are in a unique and difficult situation. However, if our state government is going to hold our employers to a certain standard, then the state agencies must also be held to that same standard and held accountable. The citizens of Washington state deserve accountability, oversight, and trust within state agencies.

To ensure our state government is working with employers, instead of against them during a state of emergency, our caucus will be pursuing legislation related to the ability of state agencies to adopt new rules and fine and penalize employers for violations of new and changing rules, guidance and proclamations during a state of emergency. The Legislature has adopted many laws pertaining to employee health and safety standards and the employers' responsibilities to provide a safe and healthy workplace. We believe our proposals will add some common sense and fairness to the rules and regulations as our employers try to survive the economic crisis they are facing.

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We are not recommending or condoning our employers and employees defy the public health guidelines. It is simply a matter of educating and guiding those who are trying to do right by their business, employees and communities. Most want to do the right thing, yet they may need education, flexibility or financial assistance from their state government instead of instilling a sense of fear.

We look forward to your response and working with your office on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Representative Keith Goehner, 12th District

Representative Mike Steele, 12th District

Representative Larry Hoff, 18th District

Representative Gina Mosbrucker, 14th District

Representative Bruce Chandler, 15th District

Representative Tom Dent, 13th District

Representative Joe Schmick, 9th District

Representative Bob McCaslin, 4th District

Representative Jenny Graham, 6th District

Representative Brad Klippert, 8th District

Representative Matt Boehnke, 8th District

Representative Mary Dye, 9th District

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Alex Ybarra

Representative Alex Ybarra, 13th District

Chris Corry

Representative Chris Corry, 14th District

Brandon Vick

Representative Brandon Vick, 18th District

Jim Walsh

Representative Jim Walsh, 19th District

Kelly Chambers

Representative Kelly Chambers, 25th District

Cyndy Jacobsen

Representative Cyndy Jacobsen, 25th District

Carolyn Eslick

Representative Carolyn Eslick, 39th District