



May 6, 2020

The Honorable Jared Polis
Governor of Colorado
200 E. Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Governor Polis,

CCI appreciates the leadership you and your administration have shown during this unprecedented time. Challenges like these emphasize the need for collaboration but also for flexibility and a deep understanding of the complexities that exist throughout the state. It is not an easy time to be a leader, but these are the moments when leaders surface.

We recognize that access to personal protective equipment (PPE) is a resource challenge our entire global community is wrestling with. Supplies of masks, sanitizer, gowns, gloves, and other PPE are hard to find and, once identified, a number of obstacles can jeopardize an order.

While this is a reality we face, we are writing today to elevate the PPE needs of county child and adult protection caseworkers. Counties consider caseworkers ‘first responders’. This aligns with a letter you recently received from the Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services. In it, Deputy Secretary Hargan urged you to “work with your emergency management and public health leadership to have child welfare workers and service providers classified as Level 1 emergency responders and, thus, have greater access to PPE.”

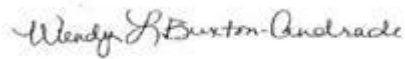
It is through their tireless work that vulnerable families, children, and adults receive the supports and services they need. Child welfare and adult protection case workers put their own safety at risk to respond to allegations of abuse and neglect during the pandemic. And we know that times of distress increase the likelihood of abuse and neglect at home. Today, more than ever, economic hardships, increased stress, and lack of outside supports are rampant. We have also seen reports from doctors that the incidents of child abuse they are seeing are more severe during this time. In addition, when it is safe to do so, our caseworkers are continuing their face-to-face visits with families, children, and at-risk adults. These visits help them determine who needs additional protections and which services can be offered to meet their needs.

County Emergency Operation Centers (EOC) are in close contact with county staff and help them identify what their PPE needs are. Our EOCs identify the ‘demand’ side of the equation and rely on the state to secure the ‘supply’ side. At a high level, this division of duty makes sense. The reality, however, is that EOCs have had to source their own PPE which has exacerbated the challenges facing the supply chain. To

provide some temporary assistance, the Colorado Human Services Directors Association and the Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman have scoured distilleries and manufacturers across the state to supply a minimal amount of hand sanitizer, as well as face coverings that do not meet the level of safety necessary for first responders.

We eagerly await the day when the PPE supply chains are robust, the supply/demand division of labor between the county and state works as intended and that our child and adult protection caseworkers know that they will have the protection they need to do their jobs without risking their own health or the health of those who depend on them. We urge you to elevate the PPE needs of these ‘first responders’ throughout the state and help us ensure their needs are met.

Sincerely,



Wendy Buxton-Andrade
Prowers County Commissioner
CCI Health & Human Services Committee Chair



Sue Hansen
Montrose County Commissioner
CCI Health & Human Services Committee Vice Chair

Cc: Michelle Barnes
Kevin Klein
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