

Dr. CODY, YOU OWE US ANSWERS

Open Letter to Dr. Sara Cody, Santa Clara County Health Officer

Dear Dr. Cody,

On March 16, you ordered the first Shelter-in-Place (SIP) for Santa Clara County. The rationale in the Order was to "slow the spread" of COVID-19, to ensure our hospitals would not be over-run.

For the next month, as unemployment skyrocketed, and civil liberties were all but eliminated, we cooperated. Then your SIP order was extended and made more draconian. And extended again, with minimal modifications, through May.

Meanwhile, substantial case data has become available that indicates that a limited, clearly defined slice of the population is at high risk, per the CDC and CA - those over 65, and those of any age with serious comorbidities.

County hospitals now have only about 3% of hospital beds and 6% of ICU beds occupied by COVID-19 patients, and the 7-day average for positive cases is less than 1.5% of total tests. Only about 100 people are hospitalized with COVID-19 in a county of 1.9 million people.

Yet your Public Health department is operating as though nothing has been learned and nothing has changed.

Meanwhile, the economic damage from SIP is fearsome and mounting. Unemployment in California has reached a Depression-era level of 25%, businesses are shuttering daily, families are going hungry, and financial stress is reaching pandemic levels.

Mindful of these facts, on May 8 Governor Newsom permitted all counties to commence 'Early Phase 2' Reopening and on May 18 provided reasonable metrics counties need to meet for FULL Phase 2 Reopening, which allows all stores and restaurants to reopen.

Santa Clara County easily meets the state's hospitalization-trend and positive-test metrics. The remaining criteria are based on the readiness of **your** Public Health Office to support reopening.

But you have not only set the bar higher than the state requires for further reopening, you are making negligible progress towards meeting the targets which you have set, and for which you are responsible. Your lack of performance is the sole reason SCC cannot reopen its small businesses in a meaningful way. You are cratering our economy, and the longer your shutdown continues, the greater and more permanent the damage becomes.

Since you are responsible for delaying reopening, you owe the people of Santa Clara County answers to these basic questions:

- **Please justify your insistence on lagging behind what the State permits, ignoring local hardship.**

Are you not aware of the need, cited by so many public health professionals and doctors, for balance between imposing extreme long-term economic distress and the single issue you are focused on? Poverty and stress also have significant impact on mortality and health. You claim that "conditions haven't really changed in our county" due to the lack of "herd immunity and a vaccine," yet everywhere else in the world it is recognized that this reasoning cannot be the guiding principle in reopening. Other states and countries are also not seeing the "exponential spread" you claim will occur on reopening.

- **Please justify why your office has not achieved the level of testing you deem a prerequisite to reopen, given the County is not using all its available test capacity.**

SCC lags far behind other counties in meeting testing goals and has not set up an efficient, coordinated testing network. Are County residents to lose their livelihoods because your office is not competent to get its act together and achieve what you have deemed to be the needed amount of testing prior to opening?

- **Please justify why you still need additional weeks to hire the contact tracers you deem a prerequisite to reopen.**

Are County residents to suffer because your office lacks the creativity and needed sense of urgency to meet your own metric, and has not aggressively leveraged the enormous resources of Silicon Valley to achieve this goal?

- **Are you willing to publicly commit to making the same financial sacrifices you are imposing on others?**

Your insistence on delay, your constantly moving goalposts, and your lack of urgency are causing small business owners to lose their livelihoods and life savings, and countless others to face long-term unemployment. You have a moral obligation to share the pain you are inflicting on others by committing to permanently donate your salary and future pension towards the relief of those you are impoverishing. At present, you are leading from behind, totally insulated from the impact of your own actions, and your salary and pension will be paid on the backs of the very people you are impoverishing.

Public health officials all over the US are reopening their local economies. They are showing respect for the financial needs, dignity, and civil liberties of Americans, and for the fact that poverty, financial stress, and blighted futures are also killers, and have enormous long-term impacts on health and wellbeing.

Your approach to reopening the economy and lack of execution towards targets are the cause of continued immense hardship. You owe us answers to these basic questions.

Sincerely,

Paulette Altmaier

On Behalf of the Suffering Residents of Santa Clara County

Contact: paulette.altmaier@gmail.com