



# CITY OF BISHOP

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March 9, 2021

Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor of California  
Governor's Office, State Capitol  
Sacramento, California 95814

**RE: Rural Standards for Tier Assignments**

Dear Governor Newsom:

The Bishop City Council requests that you give serious consideration to lowering the standards for rural counties to move up from tier to tier under the State COVID-19 guidelines. Constraining rural counties the same as urban areas is unrealistic and unreachable.

Even with the newly proposed relaxation of the purple tier (to 10 new cases per day per 100,000 population), it would require we have less than 1.8 cases per day for our tier to be lessened from widespread: essentially we would need to have 1 new case per day in a county that encompasses 10,000 square miles to move down from "widespread" transmission! This is completely un-realistic and places an undue burden on our local mom-and-pop business that have been adhering to the guidelines for the past year, and are now on the verge of shuttering forever.

There's no denying we could be doing better, and our transmission rates have gone down appreciably (to roughly 4-5 new cases per day). But the current tiered system is not equitable to counties with low populations. When one scales new cases to be in units that are per 100,000 residents, this means even if we have 9 cases in a week, we end up in the "widespread" category — any sensible person would agree that having a single-digit number of new cases in a region of 10,000 square miles be considered "widespread" emission does not make sense. The current system is not a tiered system but is bi-modal in our case, where we either have widespread transmission or no transmission. This is not an epidemiological argument, but is just an argument based on simple statistics: the current tier system is stacked against us.

The matter is exacerbated when you take into account that our area is so highly dependent on tourism, which as of now is completely allowed by the state. We recently saw that Death Valley had 800K visitors last year (which was down from 1.6M). Where does that population go into determining how we fall into the metrics? It's unrealistic to just pretend that we're in a vacuum and claiming that

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the number of people in our area at any given time consists of only our permanent population. The tiered system makes no effort to take this into account and the state needs to recognize that the tourism factor raises our population numbers significantly.

The reality is that we are a county that people want to visit — and they do, especially now that statewide travel restrictions have been eased. By a conservative estimate, we regularly have over 100K people in the valley in any given time (especially on busy weekends). Just in the city of Bishop alone, assuming an 85% occupancy at our hotels (which we regularly meet), that adds an extra 60,000 unique individuals through area each month! And that's just for the Bishop area, you can easily argue that this should be doubled for the county as a whole. No other county in the state has such a discrepancy between permanent population and population when tourists are accounted for. Why don't we account for those when determining how widespread our transmission is? If we were to do that, we would already be in the "red tier" and would likely be in "orange" by next week if our trends continue as they are.

It is for those reasons that we, at the City of Bishop, are asking you to reassess the blueprint for a safer economy for our region; because, as it is, it can easily be referred to as a blueprint for a dead economy.

We request that the State seriously consider treating rural tourist-oriented counties such as Inyo County on a different level than large urban areas. We appreciate any sensitivity you can provide on this issue.

Sincerely,



Stephen Muchovej  
Mayor

cc: Dr. Mark Ghaly, Secretary  
California Health & Human Services Agency

Jeff Griffiths, Chair  
Inyo County Board of Supervisors