



September 4, 2020

Mayor Gary Phillips
Members, San Rafael City Council
Members, Marin Board of Supervisors

Via Electronic Mail

Re: Marin County Pandemic & Latinos Policy Task Force

Dear Esteemed Elected Officials:

First, thank you all for your current efforts to address the deep impacts of the pandemic across our communities. Thank you also for your willingness to more closely examine our current response and consider strategies to improve existing efforts for effectively addressing the urgent challenges faced by neighborhoods, communities, and businesses with the highest rates of infection and the lowest resources needed to overcome the impact.

We thank you for your strong support and partnership as we craft a collaborative rapid response model. While we recognize the role of the State in providing leadership and resources, we also recognize that the level of action from state agencies must be understood to be the ground: the basic, essential support needed for minimal survival, and at the same time, a kind and level of support that regrettably is allowing far too many to fall through the safety net. In Marin County, we have the opportunity, and responsibility, to respond with a more robust and effective model for containing infections and driving a speedy economic recovery.

In partnership with several key local service and advocacy organizations and leaders of the local business community, and informed by leading regional efforts in Oakland and San Francisco, we have developed the present outline of the key areas of action that we believe can get the work moving forward quickly and in the right direction for the most immediate, widespread, and sustainable impact. As we noted in the August 17th conference call, our immediate attention is toward the short-term activities desperately needed to contain transmission and provide immediate economic and nutritional relief. These first steps are informed by initial brainstorming around mid to long term strategies to sustain the recovery through the post-pandemic period.

Critical Work for Support & Recovery

Our collaborative team has put together the following recommendations to initiate and guide the efforts of the **Policy Task Force**. Below are a set of recommendations that build on existing work and draw from a series of successful response models from across the country and neighboring counties. We want to emphasize this “best practices” aspect of the recommendations to assure all stakeholders that these are strategies, measures, and policies that have been vetted and implemented by practitioners, elected officials, agency staff, and communities. Additionally, the priority focus is on health, housing, and local businesses. While there are opportunities to also work on several other related issues and challenges, the team has identified **health, housing, and local businesses** as the most urgent and strategic priorities. As the work develops, we expect priorities to shift as a result of presumable success, opening the opportunity to lend support to the work in other areas.

Short-Term Priorities, Policies, & Strategies

Policy Task Force. The first and most urgent step in these efforts is to establish a team of leaders to provide the vision and implementation of these efforts through a multi-sector public, private, nonprofit **Policy Task Force**. As was noted in our conference call, there are major efforts and committees already assigned to manage the many aspects of the work addressing the impact of the pandemic in the county and in our cities. As we also noted, however, the extreme and continuing disparities among low-income Latinos, in both the rate of infection and the economic impact, demand a more direct and focused approach to respond to the unique challenges and opportunities in these communities. Our inability to bring the infection rates down to match the rates among the broader population demands that we get creative and more deeply invested in solutions.

To these ends, the **Policy Task Force** we envision would be authorized to act within the state of emergency context in order to expedite decision-making processes for implementing changes in programs, policies, and procedures. In this aspect, we ask for your input and guidance for what powers can be granted to the Policy Task Force to act expeditiously in enacting critical changes and additions to existing work and implementing new actions and activities. As agreed, Omar Carrera of Canal Alliance is the most appropriate person to take the lead on the Task Force but he'll need city and county agency staff on the team with the authority to implement the decisions made by the team. Chandra Alexandre of Community Action Marin and Stephanie Haffner of Legal Aid of Marin are likewise committed to the work of the Task Force as initial members.

We trust that we were clear on the conference call and in our letter that in this critical, urgent, and collaborative effort we prioritize not only the well-being of our community's most impacted and least resourced families but also the financial well-being of our local and regional economy. Regarding our economy, we place the highest priority on our local businesses and landowners who provide the jobs and homes for so many of our essential workers and the employees who sustain our region's key industries. We cannot achieve the health and economic recovery we are desperately working for without addressing the areas of greater impact and need, nor can we do so without including support for businesses and landowners. Among our key partners are Chamber of Commerce leaders who recognize the mutually-beneficial partnership these efforts provide for economic recovery and sustainability. As such, the approach is envisioned as a private, public, nonprofit partnership and the response involves an ecosystems approach which recognizes that recovery is only sustainable as a collective effort that prioritizes the most impacted, while also securing support across the business, nonprofit, and residential communities. A core value in the work is the idea that the pain of the impact of the pandemic needs to be more equitably shared across our community.

The following sections provide recommendations for the Policy Task Force in the priority areas of health, housing, and local businesses:

Health:

- Increase investment in mental health support: social services, public health now and post-pandemic planning needed for long-term efforts for dealing with pandemic symptoms and impact (violence, trauma, depression).
- Testing: more and frequent testing and convenient, rapid results (prioritizing most impacted and essential workers).

Housing: Tenants, Housing Stock, Property Owners

- Improve and conserve the existing housing stock.
- Prevent outside buyers from dominating the purchase of distressed properties and properties in low-income communities; include a first right of refusal to buy properties for community development and other nonprofit organizations, and current property residents.
- Make tenant legal representation a permanent service for low-income tenants.
- Prohibit all evictions except where there is an imminent threat to public health and safety for the duration of the pandemic and for at least three months thereafter.
- Rent stabilization: prohibit rent increases and late fees for all units in Marin.
- Suspend rent in areas highly impacted by the pandemic.
- Prohibit evictions based on rent accrued during the pandemic; convert such rent debt to consumer debt
- Create a 0% interest loan program for people to pay rental debt accrued during the pandemic; allow tenants more time to pay rental debt accrued during the pandemic.
- Limit rents charged in Low Income Housing Tax Credit funded properties.
- Property owners: Provide technical assistance, training, and support programs for landowners (securing licenses & permits, financial planning, tax preparation, legal expertise, loans, grants).

Local Businesses

- Testing: more and frequent testing, increased convenience in testing, rapid results testing (especially in high-risk sectors like grocery, restaurants, etc.).
- Protect employees who test positive and support their safe quarantine.
- Explore options for quarantine locations (schools close to their homes, other empty locations).
- Secure regular funding for income support for time off for quarantined employees.
- Explore the possibility of supporting employers to guarantee sick pay and hold jobs for quarantined employees.
- Extend drive-through testing and/or drop-in sites for all essential workers; easy and convenient hours.
- Provide business loans and/or grants (rent, payroll), starting with most impacted.
- Improve access to multilingual resources, including technical assistance, starting with most impacted
- Develop solutions to childcare shortages; resources and subsidies for childcare for business owners, with consideration for gendered impact (women-owned businesses).

Middle and Long Term Planning

The above list of recommended actions and policies focus primarily on the short-term activities needed to achieve a significant decline in infections and a substantial set of actions to help families survive the deep impacts on housing, health, income, and food security. They also focus on short-term support for landowners and businesses, to make sure they too can survive the economic impacts and remain viable businesses through and after the pandemic. However, there are a number of system issues and challenges that have provided the stark reality of how we got here; how susceptible communities have been to housing crises, how unprepared and under-resourced communities have been such that long-standing disparities provided the groundwork for extreme disparities in the context of the pandemic. These systemic issues need to be part of both the analysis to understand the nature, scope, and depth of the challenge we face today and also part of the longer-term planning for recovery, sustainability, and thriving communities among the least resourced neighborhood. To that end, the present effort will also include efforts to align the short-term response model to efforts that address housing, a living wage, access to opportunities, and larger-scale models of community development centered on and prioritizing current residents and their desire to remain in the county, in their neighborhoods.

While these longer-term planning efforts require more research, collaboration, and deliberation, there are several ideas that can provide initial guidance and a point of departure for this work. These are also ideas drawn from existing work and success stories of community development across the country and in neighboring counties. The long-term viability of a thriving community will depend on investments in public housing, community land trusts, and housing cooperatives. The long history of racial segregation, discrimination, and exclusion in housing and economic opportunities has had such a deep and lasting impact that recovery from those practices will require a strong political will, innovative strategies, rapid implementation, and creative, collaborative investment.

We are guided by a thought from the PolicyLink report: *“Local leaders closest to these issues have the solutions, but we need the political will to implement them.”*

Sincerely,



Omar Carrera
CEO Canal Alliance



Stephanie Haffner
ED Legal Aid of Marin



Chandra Alexandre
CEO Community Action Marin

Cc:
California Assemblymember Marc Levine
California State Senator Mike McGuire
U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi
U.S. Senator Kamala Harris
U.S. Senator Diane Feinstein
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Marin County Public Health Director, Kathleen Koblick
San Rafael Community Development Director, Paul Jensen
San Rafael City Manager, Jim Schutz
Department of Health and Human Services for the County of Marin Director, Benita McClarin