

**WHATCOM COUNTY
EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE**
County Courthouse
311 Grand Ave. Suite #108
Bellingham, WA 98225



Satpal Singh Sidhu
County Executive

July 23, 2020

Governor Jay Inslee
Senator Maria Cantwell
Senator Patty Murray
Representative Suzan DelBene
Representative Rick Larsen

Via email

RE: Special needs of the Point Roberts community and border cities of Whatcom County

Dear Governor Inslee, Senators Cantwell and Murray, Representatives DelBene and Larsen:

We appreciate your leadership in providing resources and policy assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

You are well aware that our unique community of Point Roberts is facing special hardship because of the Canadian border closure for the past four months and possibly continuing through the end of this year and beyond. This closure has cut off the Point Roberts' access to ordinary and necessary services as well as to its customary source of economic sustenance.

In March, assurances were given on both sides of the border that communities with unique geographical situations, such as Point Roberts, would be given some degree of flexibility under the international border closure agreement. However, neither provincial British Columbia health authorities nor the local offices of the Canadian Border Services Agency have shown any willingness or ability to provide the flexibility necessary for a more equitable situation for the residents of Point Roberts.

We have heard the residents of Point Roberts and recognize that they are being held hostage by the border restrictions and quarantine mandates. *Even though this community has seen zero cases of COVID-19*, they are unable to visit their hairstylist, acquire food for their livestock or return their library books, because those actions require crossing the border twice or even four times.

Furthermore, food deliveries to the Point's sole grocery store are down to once per week, limiting access to fresh produce and meats. Many other businesses, which primarily depend on summer tourism traffic, have lost their sole source of revenue. It's not just the full-time residents whose lives are impacted. Homeowners who have a permanent residence elsewhere, in the U.S. or Canada, are unable to perform regular maintenance on their properties.

After many discussions with community members and within our Cross-Border Taskforce, we believe that the most reliable and effective solution would be to insert language specific to Point Roberts (and perhaps also the handful of other communities physically isolated by the border closure) into the international agreement between Canada and the United States.

While recognizing that this may be difficult, please note that the current guidance documents already have special carveouts which exempt specific groups of individuals. More specifically, the

Canadian Foreign Nationals Quarantine Act includes an exception for members of indigenous groups which exist as integrated trans-border communities (see "integrated trans-border community" exception in Annex A of the act).

We believe that it would be reasonable and prudent to have a specific exemption for our unique and isolated community on the Point. An update to the document could be made ahead of the next expected extension of the reciprocal border closure agreement.

We want to underscore the urgency of finding a fix to this situation soon. We all realize that COVID-19 may be with us for many more months, and the border closure may be extended for a long period of time. We need a good solution that works for this community.

Also, we would like to reiterate that, like many other border communities, the long period of the border closure has negatively impacted the economic conditions in Whatcom County and all its cities. The Cities of Blaine, Sumas and Lynden have had the most severe negative impact on their tax revenues. We request that in the next financial stimulus package a special provision be instituted for all border counties and cities to be able bear the brunt of COVID-19 on their economies.

We are jointly making this request for policy and financial assistance for our unique situation.

Sincerely,



Satpal Singh Sidhu
County Executive



Seth Fleetwood, Mayor
City of Bellingham



Scott Korthuis, Mayor
City of Lynden



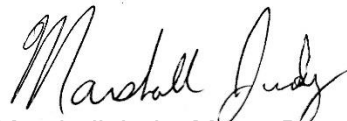
Greg Hansen, Mayor
City of Ferndale



Kyle Christensen, Mayor
City of Sumas



John Perry, Mayor
City of Everson



Marshall Judy, Mayor Pro-tem
City of Nooksack



Bonnie Onyon, Mayor
City of Blaine

cc: 40th Legislative District Senator Liz Lovelett
40th Legislative District Representative Debra Lekanoff
40th Legislative District Representative Alex Ramel
42th Legislative District Senator Doug Ericksen
42th Legislative District Representative Luanne Van Werven
42th Legislative District Representative Sharon Shewmake