



COLORADO
Department of Public
Health & Environment

May 11, 2020

Shalako Powers, County Administrator
Montezuma County
109 W. Main Street, Room 260
Cortez, CO 81321

RE: Application for Variance from Public Health Order 20-28 Safer at Home

Dear Mr. Powers:

Thank you for your recent application for a variance from Public Health Order (PHO) 20-28 Safer at Home to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE). Thank you for sharing Montezuma County's story and particularly how the COVID-19 virus is creating economic hardship. We want to support counties' ability to be less restrictive than the state, in geographic areas where it makes sense. However, our reviewers have some concerns about vulnerabilities in Montezuma County, and want to monitor the situation before further considering a variance.

As stated in Appendix G to PHO 20-28, when reviewing a variance request, we evaluate the current prevalence of COVID-19 in the jurisdiction, including whether cases are increasing, stable, or decreasing. Your application and recent data demonstrate that currently, cases are increasing, totalling 25 positive cases, with a concerning increasing trend in the last 10 days. This calls into question the stability of the doubling time of cases and raises concerns about whether cases will continue to increase in the short term. As I am sure you are aware, your neighboring counties, San Juan and McKinley Counties in New Mexico, have that state's highest death and infection rates. Should Montezuma County release restrictions, it may pull visitors from that area and cause further spread. Additionally, we understand that there is an ongoing outbreak among individuals experiencing homelessness in Montezuma County, and that there are discussions underway regarding opening an alternate care site. This would indicate that the existing hospital capacity could quickly become challenged, and the healthcare system in general may be stressed due to increasing cases in nearby jurisdictions.

Based on these concerns, the conditions are not conducive at this time for relaxing any of the Safer at Home restrictions, but we can continue to monitor disease prevalence for a time when it makes more sense from a safety perspective. When feasible, we will require a new letter of support from both the hospital system(s) in your area as well as the Ute Mountain Ute tribe as a sovereign nation.

Montezuma Variance Decision
May 11, 2020

We appreciate the work that you are doing in these difficult times to prevent further spread of disease and we are here to provide technical assistance if you need it. We look forward to working with you as a valued partner in public health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jill Hunsaker Ryan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jill Hunsaker Ryan, MPH
Executive Director