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Assembly California Legislature



ROBERT RIVAS
ASSEMBLYMEMBER, THIRTIETH DISTRICT

COMMITTEES
AGRICULTURE
APPROPRIATIONS
GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
RULES

March 20, 2020

Mark S. Ghilarducci
California Governor's Office of Emergency Services
3650 Schriever Avenue
Mather, CA 95655-4203

RE: Need for Public Reassurance Regarding Food and Necessities Security

Dear Director Ghilarducci:

As you well know, in the wake of the spread of COVID-19, there has been a rush by residents in communities across California to buy food and supplies to prepare for the most extreme of situations. Though our food supply and replenishment chains remain strong, this panic has been unfortunate and harmful to our community by leaving shelves at stores temporarily empty. In light of this, I would ask that additional guidance from both the Office of Emergency Services and Governor Newsom be amplified across a wide array of media to stress the importance of residents not hoarding food and supplies. It is my hope that this will help restore calm and ensure that all of our residents can obtain the food and supplies they need in this critical time.

This lack of food and supply has been especially harmful in Assembly District 30, which includes the agricultural Pajaro Valley and Salinas Valley. With shelter-in-place orders in effect, it has been a source for great anxiety for the nearly 100,000 farmworkers in my region, many of whom already face food insecurities due to the financial instability of agricultural-related work in the winter months. By having to travel to multiple locations, it only increases the viral exposure risk of this community. They are a vulnerable population that should be protected because farmworkers are essential to producing the fresh fruits and vegetables that feed the nation and the world. However, according to studies done in my district, farmworkers live in crowded conditions with seven or more people living in one home. Due to the lack of space to self-isolate or self-quarantine, it is imperative that more be done to preserve the health of this essential community.

Additionally, senior residents in my District are faced with difficult choices during this COVID-19 crisis. It is recommended that elderly residents shelter in place because of the greater risk of COVID-19 for their population. This has left seniors with the decision to endanger their health by leaving their homes in order to get the food and supplies needed. Grocery stores have begun to

help address this issue by having special hours for elderly residents only, but there remains a vulnerability in having to go out at all. Recent statistics from the California Department of Public Health show that 8 out of 10 deaths in the United States from COVID-19 have been adults 65 years old and older. With stronger messaging that reassure the public that food will not be in short supply, there will not only be more available at grocery stores, but hopefully also food banks will begin to see increased donations again.

The hoarding of food and increased demand has had a damaging impact on food banks in my District. Food banks have remained open and continue to serve the public, but the need has only gone up with students out of school and job layoffs in a number of local industries. These institutions already played a critical role in serving our farmworker and elderly populations, and the strain of additional need has made available supplies drastically low. A strong message is needed to assure people that there is no need to hoard food.

The importance of a decisive message on food security is of vital importance during this pandemic. I am working with local leaders to share important information received from the Governor and state agencies to help quell this panic, but additional messaging through television, radio, and online venues would be of tremendous benefit. Such messaging would be even helpful if it could reach Spanish and Indigenous language speaking populations.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this request. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly at 831-673-9499.

Respectfully,



Robert Rivas
Assemblymember, District 30
California State Assembly
RR:dd