

Governor Tim Walz
130 State Capitol
75 Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

April 28, 2020

Regarding: New Exemptions for Minnesota's Stay-at-Home Order

Dear Governor Walz,

As advocates, nonprofits, and members of sovereign nations, we the undersigned strongly oppose your April 17 decision to reopen boating and fishing nearly three weeks prior to when the Stay at Home Order is set to end (May 4). The reopening of these activities will increase urban-to-rural travel and endanger vulnerable communities with limited resources. In particular, this decision jeopardizes the health and safety of Minnesota's Indigenous communities.

With the rate of COVID-19 cases across Minnesota steadily increasing, the chances of community transmission are heightened every day. We have seen how quickly this virus can spread within rural communities, and already, several rural counties in Minnesota have much higher rates of infection per capita than hotspots in urban centers^{1,2}

Minnesota's Native reservations host many of our state's lakes and are destinations for fishing and boating. But Native people are also some of Minnesota's most vulnerable populations. Native Americans have the highest rates of pre-existing illnesses in the country.³ And many communities across Indian Country lack access to clean water, which we know is essential to handwashing and sanitation measures to prevent the fast spread of the virus.

Healthcare is another concern for rural and tribal communities. With limited healthcare access and ICU capacity, an outbreak would be completely devastating. Many of our rural communities are characterized as food deserts, meaning that many folks must travel long distances to buy groceries and supplies, or aren't able to stock up for multiple weeks at a time. Cabin owners and even day-trippers who take advantage of the lifted restrictions on boating and fishing would be traveling between counties, depleting resources from local supplies and potentially endangering Minnesotan families who have insufficient protections against the virus.

We recognize that fishing and boating are both industries that are central to our rural economies. But we need to ensure that our rural and tribal communities are just as protected as

¹ Minnesota's COVID-19 hotspot isn't in the metro — it's in one southern Minn. County. <https://bit.ly/2yraT9a>.

² Nobles County Informed of 16 New COVID-19 Cases. <https://bit.ly/2XQUZiG>

³ Indian Country, where residents suffer disproportionately from disease, is bracing for coronavirus. <https://wapo.st/2wNY6gl>

folks in urban centers, until the Stay-At-Home order is fully lifted. The risks are much too high and our most vulnerable people would be paying the price.

We urge Minnesota decision makers to reconsider their choice to open these industries early and to provide increased protections for community transmission in rural places. We also request that Tribal leadership be consulted with greater transparency before these key decisions are made. This is the time for solidarity, and for Minnesotans to take care of each other.

Sincerely,

CURE

Honor the Earth

Black Visions Collective

MN/TC Good Food Purchasing Program

White Earth Land Recovery Project

Somali Farmer Association

Toxic Taters Coalition

Pesticide Action Network

Real Food Media

VOTE Climate

Lutefisk Technologies, Inc.

Pollinate Minnesota