

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 24, 2021

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Chaves County lawmakers rally with healthcare workers

Roswell, NM – The fallout from Lujan Grisham’s vaccine mandate continues. Today Chaves County elected officials rallied with healthcare workers on the steps of the courthouse on Main Street to push back against the Governor’s blanket mandate of vaccinations for healthcare workers. New Mexico historically has struggled with staffing in rural hospitals, and the decision by the administration to exclude weekly testing, in lieu of mandatory vaccinations has forced many healthcare facilities to deal with the potential of mass layoffs and resignations.

Chaves County legislators signed a letter after the rally that strongly encourages Lujan Grisham to reconsider her mandate and consider how health worker shortages will affect rural communities. The group of lawmakers understand that a substantial number of healthcare professionals and staff remain, and intend to remain, unvaccinated. The letter asks the Governor to modify the current Public Health Order to better support medical and corrections facilities that might find it difficult to maintain staff under the current vaccine mandate. The letter was signed by State Representatives Candy Ezzell (R-Roswell), Greg Nibert (R-Roswell), Rachel Black (R-Alamogordo), Jim Townsend (R-Artesia), State Senators Cliff Pirtle (R-Roswell), Stuart Ingle (R-Portales), and David Gallegos (R-Eunice).

The rally in Roswell hosted three community healthcare workers who told their stories about how the vaccine mandate affected them and what they see in the future.

Carlsbad nurse Chrissy Licht, who is already vaccinated, spoke at the press conference “on behalf of all of our nurses that have not been vaccinated, that are refusing to be vaccinated.” Nurse Licht pointed out what a struggle it is outside of COVID to staff rural hospitals and shared her concern about how further shortages, due to a vaccine mandate, will further cripple rural healthcare systems.

Donald Wenner III, M.D., a private practice doctor in Chaves County also spoke regarding his concerns about staffing rural hospitals. Dr. Wenner pointed out that hearing in the media that hospital beds are full is only part of the story, he contends that the number of beds is directly related to staff and bed limitations is due to extremely thin staffing. He hears people saying there are nurses and medical staff “ready and willing to replace” unvaccinated staff, but questions “where are they now? We need them now.” Dr. Wenner stated he is not anti-vaccine, he is pro-patient care and is concerned about what this cut and dry mandate will do in terms of patient care at hospitals or facilities that have historically struggled with staffing.

Renee Brock, mother of a recent nurse graduate, told a story about her daughter calling her in tears after being told that she will lose her new job if she does not comply with the vaccine mandate. Chrissy and her daughter are going to a doctor to see about a medical exemption because of her daughter’s autoimmune disease. Renee said she would like to see more work towards finding a “treatment for COVID,” instead of pushing the vaccine mandate.

A partially signed copy of the letter is attached to this email (two others will sign in Santa Fe). Video of the rally and speakers can be made available upon request (however it does have lighting issues- sun glare).

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House of Representatives
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August 24, 2021

The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham, Governor
State of New Mexico
State Capitol Building, Suite 400
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Re: Medical Facilities

Dear Governor Lujan Grisham:

A year and a half ago all doctors, nurses and medical staff were being lauded as heroes for entering medical facilities and attending to those who were ill from a little known virus that was inflicting devastating consequences on people in our state, nation and the entire world. With the stroke of a pen these heroes are now being vilified, many for their strong convictions, for making personal decisions despite their willingness to continue to serve the medical needs of our community. The undersigned Senators and Representatives have each been contacted by a number of healthcare professionals asking us to relay their thoughts and concerns to your office. We have been further informed that a substantial number of healthcare professionals and staff remain, and intend to remain, unvaccinated. In many facilities that percentage is in the 30% to 40% range.

By prohibiting unvaccinated workers from entering healthcare facilities, the medical demands of our community will be jeopardized. It is a very real probability that our medical facilities will have to curtail services or possibly close due to the inability to have sufficient employees on site to attend to those medical needs. This will come at a time when we have an uptick in demand due to the COVID spike.

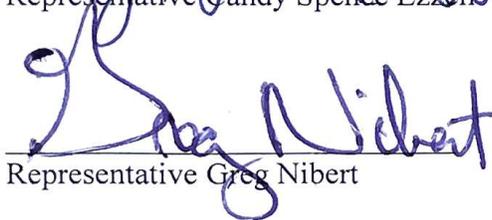
It is our request for you to exempt medical facilities in Southeast New Mexico to allow the facilities to continue to meet the healthcare needs of our communities. While the concerns that have been expressed to us are from communities in Southeast New Mexico, we have heard the same situation exists statewide. If that is the case, our request is for you to modify the Order so that healthcare facilities can continue to serve the critical healthcare needs in every community in the state.

Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham
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We remain hopeful the spike in the COVID cases will take the same trajectory in our state as has been the case in many countries where this variant was first encountered. We appreciate your administration's efforts to re-open schools and to change the protocols in the educational arena. We hope you will do the same with respect to the medical facilities, detention centers and jails, and other facilities that find it difficult to comply with the recent healthcare Order. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Respectfully submitted,


Representative Candy Spence Ezzell


Representative Greg Nibert


Representative James G. Townsend

Representative Rachel Black



Senator Cliff Pirtle

Senator Stuart Ingle



Senator David Gallegos