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San Juan County Senators join letter to San Juan Regional Medical Center CEO, Sound the alarm regarding looming health care worker shortage

SANTA FE — With the deadline for Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham’s vaccine mandate for healthcare workers rapidly approaching, Republican legislators continue to raise concerns regarding the potentially catastrophic impact on rural health care facilities. One such hospital facing a health care worker shortage is San Juan Regional Medical Center (SJRMC) in Farmington, New Mexico. Today, San Juan County Senators Steven Neville and Williams Sharer joined Representatives Rod Montoya, James Strickler, and Ryan Lane in submitting a letter to the CEO of SJRMC, requesting that the hospital reject the vaccine mandate in order to avoid a rationing of care or closure of the hospital.

Senator William Sharer (District 1-San Juan) and **Senator Steven Neville** (District 2-San Juan) issued the following joint statement regarding their request:

“The people of northwest New Mexico must have continued access to the vital health care provided at San Juan Regional Medical Center. It is chilling to imagine the fallout if the only major hospital in our corner of the state has to close or ration care. None of us deny the dangers of COVID-19, but as the President of the New Mexico Hospital Association recently [stated](#), the number one issue facing our hospitals right now is not COVID-19—it is staffing.”

“We hope the hospital administrators do all they can to keep their staff in place and keep their doors open. Whatever the concerns of the health care workers who are not vaccinated may be, now is not the time to turn them away. Too many lives are at stake.”

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New Mexico State Legislature

STATE CAPITOL
Santa Fe

8/26/21

Mr. Jeff Bourgeois
President/ Chief Executive Officer
San Juan Regional Medical Center (SJRM)
801 W Maple St.
Farmington, NM 87401

SJRM Board of Directors
San Juan Regional Medical Center
801 W. Maple St.
Farmington, NM 87401

Dear Mr. Bourgeois and SJRM Board Members:

We are writing to strongly urge you to reject the Governor's unconstitutional mandate that health care staff must be fully vaccinated as condition of employment. We have personally heard from numerous employees of your hospital in the past week, and they have confirmed that if forced to make a decision between a rushed vaccine and their job, they will opt to seek employment elsewhere.

While we are greatly concerned about the safety of health care workers, we are equally concerned that the Governor's vaccination mandate will result in making the current health care worker shortage worse. According to statistics released by the University of New Mexico's Health Sciences Center, San Juan County is down 33 Primary Care Physicians compared to the 2020 benchmark, as well as down 12 Physicians Assistants, 37 Nurse Practitioner, 114 EMT's, and down 57 Physical Therapists from the 2020 benchmark. Even more troubling, the number of nurses in the county are 406 below 2020. It is also our understanding that ambulance service may be reduced in the upcoming week.

The DOH has recently admitted that hospital staff are leaving because of trauma and exhaustion. Forcing as many as 30 percent of your staff, who are currently not vaccinated, into making a career decision at a time when patient numbers are rising will have the effect of dramatically hampering your hospital's ability to provide quality care for the residents of San Juan County. Such an outcome would be devastating to our community and those who should expect quality medical services.

Prior to the roll out of the vaccine, hospital staff have managed their own health care while they have helped COVID and non-COVID patients alike. They have previously navigated the pandemic successfully while providing health care to the citizens of our state. Yet, the people who were called heroes last year are now being called careless and stupid. In our opinion, they have earned the right to decide for themselves if the vaccine is for them, and no Governor or hospital administrator should force (or coerce) these professionals into making a personal health care decision that goes against their own judgment.

As legislators who represent San Juan County, we are contacted daily by health care professionals as well as residents throughout our districts who are worried about the continued shortage of health care staff and diminished care at SJRM. Sadly, while the current staffing shortage appears to have no end in

sight, going along with the Governor's mandate will push a critical workforce that is already stretched thin towards greater crisis.

We implore you to reject the Governor's short-sighted mandate and fight for these highly-trained health care professionals to make their own decisions as to what is best for themselves. In place of the Governor's dictatorial approach, we encourage the hospital to develop a voluntary-based effort centered on continuation of masks, testing and monitoring protocols.

As a community owned hospital, preserving the health care quality and viability of San Juan Regional Medical Center is a moral responsibility of hospital management, health care staff, and every public official. We implore you to do your duty to serve the people of San Juan County and our hospital staff.

We encourage you to join us in voicing objection to the inevitable consequences of an unnecessary exodus of health care workers, and how it will negatively impact San Juan County residents who depend upon the hospital for the care they need. SJRMC should consider all options including filing an injunctive action against the Governor and her reckless mandate.

Thank you for your consideration of our requests as we stand ready to assist San Juan Regional in continuing its valuable service to northwestern New Mexico.

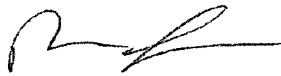
Respectfully,



Rep. Rod Montoya – HD#1



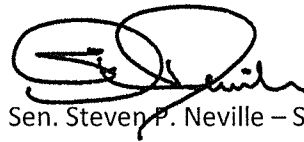
Rep. James Strickler – HD#2



Rep. Ryan Lane – HD#3



Sen. William E. Sharer - SD# 1



Sen. Steven P. Neville – SD#2