

Supervisors ask for greater role in deciding COVID restrictions

January 14, 2021



With a unanimous vote, the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors approved a resolution asking the state of California to give the county a greater say in provisions set to control COVID-19.

Board Chair Chris Howard presented the Healthy Communities Resolution to the board, saying the state's one-size-fits-all approach is not working in Del Norte County.

"Many of our rural counties have expressed strong interest that they know what to do best for their communities as it relates to building a safer community around COVID," Howard explained. "This county in particular talks very highly of getting away from a one-size-fits-all approach that generally we have the short end of the stick when it comes to the state of California. I don't think I have tell many of you under Gov. Newsom's orders as it relates to the blueprint and the rollout and impacts of some of our businesses or lost businesses that Del Norte County probably could have responded a little bit better than Gov. Newsom knowing that here locally we have a better connection to our community."

The resolution lays out issues seen in Del Norte County since the lockdowns began, primarily increased crime, increased need for mental health services and devastation to local businesses.

Supervisor Darin Short said the county needs to have a greater say in what steps are taken to control COVID-19 in the community.

“I think it’s a long overdue resolution. Our businesses are certainly suffering,” Short said. “I see Humboldt County has opened to a degree that’s higher than ours. I think the only hard ‘no’ for Humboldt County is bars, and every other restaurant and every other mom and pop can open at 25 or 50 percent capacity for indoor services. The one-size-fits-all does hurt our county and we do need to send that message.”

Supervisor Valerie Starkey said she had a hard time deciding how to vote because she doesn’t want anyone to think COVID-19 is not serious.

“I really went back and forth on this resolution,” Starkey said. “What I really hope we relay here is we are not signaling the lack of importance to continue to wear our masks, to continue to social distance, to continue to listen to the scientists and the medical professionals. What I really concluded when reading this is we want a seat at the table. We want to be there when the decisions are made with regard to how we are going to handle certain situations in our community because we have an understanding of what our community needs.”

Supervisor Gerry Hemmingsen made a motion to approve the resolution with Short seconding it.

Before the vote, Howard, again, pointed out the resolution is not meant to downplay the seriousness of COVID-19.

“The comments that have all been expressed to our board members over the last year, we hear you loud and clear and this gives us something we can take to the state,” Howard said. “As Supervisor Starkey said, it doesn’t mean we relax our precautions. More importantly, we emphasize those to respect those around you. That’s so important these days so we can keep our spread rate low. We want to continue to hear great reports from Dr. Rehwaldt as we move forward in 2021 and, more importantly, we want to keep a track record of very low loss of life, which is so very important.”