RESOLUTION - ACTION REQUESTED 2020-243

MEETING: May 19, 2020

TO: The Board of Supervisors

FROM: Dallin Kimble, County Administrative Officer

RE: Ratify a Letter of Support for CARES 4 Funding

RECOMMENDATION AND JUSTIFICATION:
Ratify a Letter of Support Requesting Federal Funding for Counties in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

A fourth round of Congressional negotiations around coronavirus relief includes some potential relief for counties. Across America, Counties operate nearly 1,000 public hospitals, 1,900 local public health departments, more than 800 long-term care facilities and 750 behavioral health departments. Counties are responsible for essential functions including emergency operations centers, human services, jail management, 911 services, veterans' services, coroners and medical examiners. Through these services, counties act as the nation’s front line of defense in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Mariposa County, like counties across the country, is simultaneously experiencing a dramatic loss in revenue even as additional services are needed to respond. Previous rounds of relief funding stipulated direct funding only to large jurisdictions with more than 500,000 population. This letter, which the National Association of Counties requested on April 29 and was due on April 30, specifically requests direct support for small and rural county governments with flexibility to address both lost revenue and additional expenditures.

Given its alignment with the legislative platform and the short timeframe, staff has already sent this letter of support and recommends approval of this request to ratify that action.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF BOARD ACTIONS:
The Board routinely approves or ratifies letters of support that it determines to be in the best interest of the county.

ALTERNATIVES AND CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION:
Do not approve. Staff would notify recipients of a retraction in that event.
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ATTACHMENTS:
Letter requesting California County Funding due to COVID-19 Pandemic  (PDF)

RESULT:  ADOPTED BY CONSENT VOTE [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:  Rosemarie Smallcombe, District I Supervisor
SECONDER:  Merlin Jones, District II Supervisor
AYES:  Smallcombe, Jones, Long, Cann, Menetrey
April 30, 2020

Nancy Pelosi
1236 Longworth H.O.B.
Washington, DC 20515

Kevin McCarthy
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Subject: California County Government Funding due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

Mariposa County joins with its sister jurisdictions across the nation to urge your support for robust funding for county governments of all sizes. While many are struggling mentally, physically and economically as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, counties are simultaneously facing dramatic increases in costs as we operate our emergency operations centers, enforce public health orders, make accommodations in our jails, build alternative care sites, develop additional testing sites, add quarantine capacity for our most vulnerable populations, serve as the coroner, provide veterans’ services, and continue to respond to emergency calls for service. Counties are the nation’s first line of defense against the coronavirus pandemic; and we need your help.

Mariposa County is the proud home of Yosemite National Park. While other jurisdictions commonly rely on sales or property taxes to fund core services including law enforcement and fire response, our small rural county relies heavily on the dollars we get from visitors staying in our hotels and eating in our restaurants. Limits on non-essential travel, while appropriate for the situation, create a disproportionate fiscal hardship for destination locations.

Our county has only one small hospital. Many of our residents would have to drive an hour or more to the next closest medical facility. This hospital, which resides in an independent special district, has not had sufficient funding to keep up with projected surge needs. Mariposa County has been called upon to fill the void with an alternate care site located in our county fairgrounds.

Resources have been stretched in many other areas as well. The County is renting an entire hotel to quarantine vulnerable populations, secured appropriate freezer trailers to meet coroner needs, and is opening a new testing site at a former middle school today. We have been forced to add significant technological infrastructure to support telework at a scale we could not have anticipated. Many of our
staff are unable to work due to health issues or childcare needs and many more have been reassigned from their regular duties to support the emergency response effort.

Mariposa County is also a strong partner with our local business community. The good people that operate businesses here have endured twelve (12) local emergencies in the last four (4) years, including the Detwiler Fire (82,000 acres burned), the Ferguson Fire (97,000 acres burned), multiple significant floods, and other impactful events that have depleted their reserves and ours. We are working with our businesses to innovate, develop more digital assets, find and navigate available funding sources, and develop new partnerships that will last beyond the end of the stay-at-home orders.

The frequency of disasters has many local governments struggling with cash flow and reserve issues. Mariposa County expects to avoid the need for an operating loan in the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, but will begin the next fiscal year with less than one-third of one month of payroll in reserve. An extended event due to COVID-19, or another event such as a wildfire, would effectively break the bank and require dramatic action including more lost jobs.

While the funding provided through the Coronavirus Relief Fund in the CARES Act was an important first step in getting much-needed relief to our localities, providing direct funding only to localities with populations over 500,000 makes it difficult for counties to know what will be available for our needs. Because no two counties are exactly the same, counties must be empowered with greater flexibility to spend federal relief dollars at their discretion to make up for lost revenues or meet the expense challenges we are facing.

We ask for particular focus on smaller and more rural counties—which need to continue supporting their hospitals, emergency response centers, and more—to ensure they receive adequate resources to successfully address the needs of their residents. As such, we urge you to disburse funding directly to localities, with no population minimum, to ensure that these allocations more closely reflect the special role and critical responsibilities of county governments of all sizes during this public health crisis.

We thank you for your leadership during this crisis and thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Kevin Cann, Chair

cc: Governor Gavin Newsom
Senator Dianne Feinstein
Senator Kamala Harris
Congressman Tom McClintock