

March 27, 2020

Open Letter To Governor Inslee: Licensed Firearms Dealers Are Essential Businesses

Governor Inslee:

We, the undersigned, ask you to promptly amend your March 23, 2020 Executive Order to include licensed firearms dealers as essential businesses. There are three primary reasons for you to take this step immediately.

First, your Order threatens the continued operations of our county sheriff departments as well as many other local law enforcement departments around the state. Many of the law enforcement officials signing this letter leads a department that relies on local licensed firearms dealers for on- and off-duty firearms and ammunition. For many of us, we and our deputies routinely purchase firearms, ammunition, and other equipment from licensed firearms dealers. Your Order shuttering those businesses will prevent members of local law enforcement departments from continuing to do so, and threaten the continued operations of local law enforcement departments around the state.

Second, your Order threatens the safety of thousands of Washington citizens. Every security business in the state relies on licensed dealers for firearms and ammunition, and your Order blocks their ability to procure the tools required to perform those jobs—jobs which your Order deems essential. It is essential that security businesses can procure the tools needed for their essential operations.

Local law enforcement officials have also seen a significant increase in background checks in this time of crisis, when thousands of Washingtonians have decided to purchase firearms for personal protection. Many of those purchases are first time buyers. Many firearms purchasers who have passed background checks will be unable to take delivery of firearms they have already selected if the dealers are required to close immediately. Many of us are responsible for the safety of large rural areas of our State, where local law enforcement cannot appear instantly in response to every threat faced by our citizens. It is vital to the safety of our citizens that they have the tools to protect themselves and their families.

Third, your Order unduly burdens the constitutional rights of the people of Washington. Licensed firearms dealers have already implemented stringent cleaning, sanitation, and social distancing rules to ensure the health and safety of themselves, their employees, and their customers. Closing licensed firearms dealers means terminating the ability of all Washington citizens to exercise the rights guaranteed to them by the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and Article I, Section 24 of the Washington Constitution. Under our laws, there is no alternative way to exercise these rights. Libraries have expanded digital access to books; schools are dedicating resources to online learning; our state's medical professionals are

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expanding telemedicine. For citizens who elect to purchase a firearm, that can only be done in person, after a background check, in front of a licensed firearms dealer. It cannot be done remotely or online.

Health and safety precautions such as limiting the number of people in one location, social distancing, and cleaning and sanitation are of course appropriate to require, but compelling these essential businesses to close violates the state and federal constitution, threatens the safety of our citizens, and threatens the smooth operation of many local law enforcement agencies.

Please immediately reconsider your Order and add licensed firearms dealers to the list of essential businesses.

Signed by:

Sheriff Ozzie Knezovich
Spokane County

Sheriff Mark Crider
Walla Walla County

Sheriff Adam Fortney
Snohomish County

Sheriff Bob Songer
Klickitat County

Sheriff Brian Burnett
Chelan County

Sheriff Don McDermott
Skagit County

Sheriff Chuck Atkins
Clark County

Sheriff Kevin Morris
Douglas County

Sheriff Tony Hawley
Okanogan County

Chief James McElvain
City of Vancouver

Chief Marcos Ruiz
City of Brewster

Chief Kevin Fuhr
City of Moses Lake

Officer Jeff Skeie
Kalama Police Department

Sheriff Robert Udell
Yakima County

Sheriff Wade Magers
Lincoln County