

TO: Orange County Board of Supervisors
FROM: Toni Nelson, Founder of Capo Cares, Capistrano Beach
RE: Beach closures and response to Covid-19 Pandemic

I am very concerned by what I see as a lack of leadership on the part of our Board of Supervisors. Businesses are suffering, people are losing jobs and residents are stressed from weeks of quarantine. We all want to see businesses open and people go back to work. Although protestors make news, it is foolhardy to think they represent the majority of your constituents. According to a recent poll, 83% of residents, from both parties, approve of the job our Governor is doing on this crisis. Clearly, the vast majority of us understand the need to open the economy with the utmost caution because of the very real public health risks from Covid-19.

Months into this pandemic, Orange County still seems to be lagging behind in terms of testing. Barely 1% of our population has been tested, and there is no clear messaging on reliable and readily available testing for either covid-19 or the associated antibodies. Expert after expert has opined that the only safe way to reopen the economy is to ensure that adequate testing and contact tracing is in place so that new cases can be isolated and their contacts immediately tested and quarantined to avoid serious outbreaks. I have no confidence that these elements are in place in Orange County.

Yesterday, I read a statement by Supervisors Steel and Wagner supporting a restaurant that violated the mandate and opened for dining in San Clemente. There were photographs and news reports showing a flagrant disregard for social distancing or any other guidelines to protect public health. Instead of enforcing the mandate, you are actually complicit in undermining it. How can we possibly trust that you will put our health first?

Like all Orange County residents, I want to see our economy bounce back. And I will be much more likely to patronize shops and restaurants if I feel our leaders are safeguarding our health and enforcing firm guidelines. Instead, residents see you wasting time on childish, political antics that give us zero confidence in your ability to handle this crisis. You had ample opportunity to take reasonable precautions to ensure beaches did not become overcrowded and distancing could be maintained, but you refused. And when the Governor stepped in, you stayed silent when our Orange County Sheriff refused to enforce state mandates, leaving unsupported County Rangers to take abuse from belligerent beachgoers. This continued at the City level, where we saw our leaders wasting time and tax dollars to score political points with needless litigation.

Coronavirus doesn't care what political party we support. We need calm adults at the helm --people who can put politics aside and work effectively with leaders at all levels.

Please. Stop playing politics with our health. We need you to enforce guidelines, and get effective, rapid testing and contact tracing onboard. If you do not, you risk opening Orange County businesses that will be patronized solely by the protestors you seem to support. The rest of us, the vast majority of County residents, will be at home until we have confidence that it's safe to come out.