



Press Release

Date: September 22, 2021

Contact: Holly Kerns or Ashley McClay, 541-523-0014, pio@bakercounty.org

Baker County declares emergency, requests medical staff assistance

The Baker County Board of Commissioners declared a local emergency today. The declaration states the Baker County Incident Management Team determined beginning October 18, Baker County will be unable to provide for pre-hospital emergency response and Saint Alphonsus Medical Center will be unable to provide basic hospital care as a result of staffing shortages when the COVID-19 vaccine mandate for medical staff goes into effect.

The declaration requested the Governor address the state's vaccine mandates, "to prevent further erosion of the vital public health and safety workforce", or provide resources necessary to protect the citizens and visitors of Baker County, along with users of the state highway system.

"The impending deadline for all healthcare workers to be fully vaccinated by October 18 has led to a series of difficult choices. We can't head into a situation where there are not enough responders available to handle medical events throughout the County, including those that happen on the highways and interstate. We also cannot accept a situation where the hospital doesn't have sufficient staffing to provide basic hospital care. Our responsibility is to the health and safety of our community, and we have to come up with options for the inevitable times when accidents or health emergencies will occur," Commissioner Mark Bennett said.

The declaration outlines how the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exhausted many providers of core public services, including first responders and healthcare providers. The recent rise in COVID-19 cases has further strained those services. The mandate for health care workers to be fully vaccinated by October 18 is resulting in "significant numbers of the exhausted workforce" to leave employment, resulting in a situation where there will not be enough remaining personnel to provide the basic level of pre-hospital emergency care and hospital care that's needed.

County Commissioners have pledged to continue working with state and local partners on solutions to maintain health services throughout the county. The full declaration is attached.

**COUNTY OF BAKER
BOARD of COMMISSIONERS**

DECLARATION OF LOCAL EMERGENCY

WHEREAS, *the Baker County Incident Management Team determined that, on or about 0000 hours on 18 October 2021 that Baker County will be unable to provide for pre-hospital emergency medical response, and that the Saint Alphonsus Medical Center (Baker County's sole hospital) will be unable to provide basic hospital care as a result of staffing shortages due to the implementation of the State of Oregon requirement of COVID 19 vaccination for medical and correctional staff.*

WHEREAS the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exhausted many providers of core public services, including first responders, healthcare providers, emergency services, public health, and public safety, among many others; and

WHEREAS the recent surge of COVID-19 cases due to the Delta variant has further strained those crucial services, filling our hospitals with COVID-19 patients; and

WHEREAS, in an effort to address this new surge, the State of Oregon has attempted to further increase the percentage of Oregonians who are vaccinated by imposing vaccine mandates on certain sectors, including those who work within elements of the healthcare, emergency services, and public safety systems; and

WHEREAS those efforts have incentivized additional Oregonians to obtain vaccinations; and

WHEREAS those efforts now resulted in significant numbers of the exhausted workforce in those critical public health and safety systems to leave employment; and

WHEREAS concerns are now in place that there will be insufficient remaining personnel resources to provide basic public health and safety services, such as the operation of pre-hospital emergency services, along with hospital care. Specifically, Baker County as the Ambulance Service Area (ASA) shall be unable to provide pre-hospital medical care to the I-84 corridor, Oregon State routes 7, 30, 86, 203, and 245, the cities of Baker City, Halfway, Haines, Huntington, Richland, Sumpter, Unity, Greenhorn and the unincorporated areas of the county. The sole hospital in Baker County shall be unable to provide medical services due to lack of trained staff and more; and

NOW THEREFORE, in Accordance with ORS 401.309, be it declared by the Baker County Board of Commissioners that a Local Emergency shall occur in Baker County due to the Vaccine Mandate by the State of Oregon, and that immediate actions are required to protect the citizens and visitors of Baker County and the traveling public.

(1) A state of emergency is declared within Baker County due to the immediately foreseeable lack of adequate resources to respond to basic needs for public health and safety services; and

(2) This state of emergency is limited to the period of time during which the conditions described above remain in existence; and


It is Further Declared that since a **Local Emergency** is imminent, the Baker County Board of Commissioners does hereby request and entreat the Honorable Kate Brown, Governor, of the State of Oregon direct that the State of Oregon now address its vaccine mandates to prevent further erosion of the vital public health and safety workforce. In the event that the State of Oregon determines that the mandate is too critical to public safety, Baker County requests the Governor provide aid and assistance to Baker County in the form of such State assets and resources as is necessary to protect the citizens, and visitors of Baker County, along with the users of the state highway system.

Signed at 10:30 hrs. on the 22nd day of September, 2021

Baker County Board of Commissioners



William "Bill" Harvey, Chairman



Mark E. Bennett, Commissioner



Bruce A. Nichols, Commissioner