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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

First and foremost, I want to convey my admiration and respect for those individuals in our community combating COVID-19 in their personal and professional lives. To our first responders, medical professionals, local health department, and countless others, thank you for all you have done to keep the residents of Coles County safe.

With that in mind, I have received an outpouring of concern and questions from local business owners and churches about the uncertain future. To date, Coles County citizens have accepted the hardships and restrictions without question as a necessity to save lives. As we fast approach almost two months of reduced civil liberties, our residents are questioning the authority and logic behind some of the more demanding aspects of this order. Examples include church services, stay-at-home requirements, and the complete closure of many local businesses. Many of these people have turned to my office for guidance.

In response to the growing concerns of criminal liability for re-opening businesses within our county, I am notifying the residents of Coles County that the Coles County State's

Attorney's Office will not file charges against businesses or churches that decide to re-open with social distancing protocols in place.

This position is not to be viewed as a denouncement of Governor Pritzker's order as a whole or to be viewed as indifference to the Illinois Department of Public Health's directives for social distancing and similar safety measures. My decision is based upon my view of the law as it pertains to specific aspects of the Governor's Order, namely, the mandated closure of churches and businesses. This decision is not made lightly and is accompanied by the following clarification. As it pertains to positive COVID-19 patients and mandated quarantine, this office will continue to enforce such actions when requested to do so.

Business owners holding licenses should contact legal counsel for advice as to the risk to their specific license should they choose to re-open. Also, churches and businesses are encouraged to seek legal counsel as to the consequential impact the decision to re-open may have in regards to such things as insurance coverage and liability for possible state penalties. My position on criminal prosecution has no effect on civil liability or state and local licensure penalties. The individual business owner or church advisory board must decide if they believe re-opening their business or church can be accomplished in a way that protects and safeguards those individuals coming into their building.

If a business or church does decide to re-open, I implore them to implement and enforce social distancing, face covering, disinfecting, and other safety protocols set forth by the Illinois Department of Public Health. If a patron or parishioner refuses to adhere to these safety measures, that business or church has the right to ask that individual to leave or face trespassing actions. Vigilance by all citizens is necessary to ensure that our community is not put at great risk. For the same reason, the Coles County State's Attorney's Office will also be enforcing reckless conduct violations, trespassing violations, and cease and desist orders resulting from such circumstances, when appropriate.

It is my opinion the citizens of Coles County will act responsibly and do what is best for our community and each other by practicing the safety measures set forth by the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Coles County Health Department and together we will get through this difficult time.

Thank you.

JESSE DANLEY
COLES COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY