

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Michelle Park Steel
Chairwoman, Second District
County of Orange
333 W. Santa Ana Blvd.
Santa Ana, CA 92702-0687

The Honorable Andrew Do
Vice Chairman, First District
County of Orange
333 W. Santa Ana Blvd.
Santa Ana, CA 92702-0687

The Honorable Donald P. Wagner
Supervisor, Third District
County of Orange
333 W. Santa Ana Blvd.
Santa Ana, CA 92702-0687

The Honorable Doug Chaffee
Supervisor, Fourth District
County of Orange
333 W. Santa Ana Blvd.
Santa Ana, CA 92702-0687

The Honorable Lisa A. Bartlett
Supervisor, Fifth District
County of Orange
333 W. Santa Ana Blvd.
Santa Ana, CA 92702-0687

Dear Chairwoman Steel, Vice Chairman Do, Supervisor Wagner, Supervisor Chaffee, and Supervisor Bartlett,

As you work to help Orange County families and businesses weather the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, we request your consideration to delay the April 10, 2020 deadline to pay Orange County property taxes and the July 1, 2020 deadline for delinquent taxes to start accruing penalties of 1.5 percent each month. We further request you consider updating the County's Health Officer's Order to follow the State's directive to shelter-in-place immediately and provide clear guidance regarding what constitutes an essential business.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced a massive reduction in workers' hours or the elimination of jobs entirely. In these economic conditions, Orange County families are struggling to determine how they will keep a roof over their heads. Fortunately, the Governor issued an executive order that authorizes local governments to halt evictions for renters, landlords, and homeowners, slows foreclosures, and protects against utility shutoffs for Californians affected by COVID-19. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of the Treasury and the Internal Revenue Service also announced that Americans owing up to \$1 million in federal income tax and businesses owing up to \$10 million in federal income tax would have an additional 90 days, until July 15, 2020, to make their tax payments without penalty or interest.

Given these federal and state actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we request you consider delaying the April 10, 2020 deadline for Orange County homeowners and landlords to pay their 2020 property taxes for 90 days until July 9, 2020. We further request you consider delaying the July 1 deadline for delinquent taxes to start accruing penalties of 1.5 percent each month for 90 days until September 29, 2020.

Additionally, we understand that previous County public health guidelines adhered to then-current California Department of Public Health guidance and was meant to maintain business operations while practicing precautions such as social distancing. However, our offices received questions from many constituents stating that the County’s guidance created more confusion and forced them to go home one day under shelter in place orders but be forced to report the next day as if nothing had happened. This sudden change in guidance was not only confusing but was also dangerous as it did not promote the safety precautions prescribed by public health experts. The exponential growth of positive COVID-19 cases throughout the State of California requires extreme proactive measures to arrest further growth of this virus.

As you know, there is currently no known vaccine or treatment for COVID-19. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus as the virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person. While we understand and appreciate the County’s desire to protect local businesses with a broad definition of an essential business, we strongly urge the County to consider explicitly ordering all residents to follow the State’s orders to not to leave their homes and shelter-in-place while providing a narrow and clear directive as to what constitutes an essential business. We agree with your desire to protect Orange County businesses, but we must work together to “flatten the curve” to ensure we do not put our health systems, first responders, and all of our constituents in greater danger.

Protecting Orange County residents requires a close partnership with County officials to ensure federal assistance is delivered efficiently, effectively, and without delay. Strong leadership and clear communication from the County will help ensure that federal resources compliment state and local programs meant to promote the health and safety of every Orange County resident. We look forward to working with the Board of Supervisors to find solutions that protect Orange County residents and businesses in the process of restoring everything that makes our County great.

Sincerely,

Harley Rouda
Member of Congress

Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress

J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress

Mike Levin
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Katie Porter
Member of Congress

Linda Sánchez
Member of Congress