

Board of Commissioners Votes to Extend Emergency Declaration



The interim guidance we're providing is based on what is currently known about COVID-19. Multnomah County will update this interim guidance as additional information becomes available. (<http://multco.us/web/20200414082619/https://multco.us/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/notifications/interim-guidance-were-providing-based-what-currently-known>)

April 9, 2020

The Multnomah County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously Thursday, April 9, to [extend a declaration of emergency](#) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20200414082619/https://multco.us/file/87657/download>) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by 90 days . The original declaration was set to expire April 10. All extensions require board approval.

Chair Deborah Kafoury declared an initial emergency March 11, 2020, one day after the first presumptive positive case of COVID-19 was announced in Multnomah County.

“I knew it was the most grave decision I’ve had to make as County Chair, not because of the action itself, but because of the circumstances that required such an action,” she said.

The emergency declaration, Chair Kafoury said, provides additional tools and authority that are crucial to the County’s ability to properly address the threats and fallout from the ongoing crisis.

Under the declaration, the County has mobilized resources to build up infrastructure intended not only to flatten the curve of infections, but also to ensure that particularly vulnerable people are not further harmed by measures designed to uphold the health of the community.

“We’ve done this in a way that ensures we don’t leave behind our neighbors for whom staying home is impossible or, in some cases, dangerous,” Chair Kafoury said.

The extension also adds to the initial declaration. Assistant County Attorney David Blankfeld said the extension adds a civil fine component to help with enforcing any violation of the emergency declaration — up to \$1,000 per day per offense.

Blankfeld said the County hopes to avoid using the civil fine, but said it provides “another ability to encourage people to comply, after education and notification.”

The extension approved Thursday also highlights anew the County's ability to commandeer private property. That authority was in the first declaration, but its presence in the executive rule is called out in the extension.

"In order to do everything we can to slow the spread of this virus, Multnomah County must continue to remain flexible, and responsive to new emerging needs from our community," Chair Kafoury said.

Since the initial declaration, the County has taken several steps to assist community members for whom staying home to stay healthy is impossible, or even dangerous. Those actions include:

- Spreading out almost 400 shelter beds from existing sites to four temporary extension facilities, to comply with health guidance on physical distancing.
- Partnering with two local motels with up to 120 motel rooms for people in shelters who develop respiratory symptoms.
- Placing a temporary moratorium on residential evictions.
- Investing \$100,000 into emergency motel vouchers for people experiencing or at risk of domestic violence.

The County is also working to expand food and meal services to people and households facing food insecurity.

"Our role at the County is to make sure we are always there for those who need us, but this is especially true during a community-wide crisis — when everyday gaps in access to help can quickly become chasms," Chair Kafoury said.

Still, Chair Kafoury said, the COVID-19 crisis will require an ongoing response.

"We need to improve upon and expand what we've built, so that every single person in our community has the information, resources, support and shelter they need to stay healthy, and not get left behind," she said.

The Chair also took a moment to thank Multnomah County employees for their work to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

"Even amid anxiety for friends and family, or for loved ones across the country or the world, County staff continue to work with health and safety at the forefront of their minds," she said, "with compassion and a tireless sense of commitment to serving others."

