

OKALOOSA COUNTY DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY PROTECTIVE MEASURES RELATED TO COVID-19

WHEREAS, Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a severe acute respiratory illness that can spread among humans through respiratory transmission and other potential methods, and presents symptoms similar to those of influenza; and

WHEREAS, in December 2019, a new and substantial outbreak of COVID-19 emerged in Wuhan, China, and has since spread rapidly to 150 countries and territories throughout the World, including the United States, and more specifically Okaloosa County and 26 other counties in the State of Florida; and

WHEREAS, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic; and

WHEREAS, on March 13, 2020, President of the United States, Donald J. Trump, issued a Proclamation on Declaring a National Emergency Concerning the Novel Coronavirus Disease Outbreak pursuant to section 501 (b) of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act; and

WHEREAS, as of March 18, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is reporting that the total confirmed cases in the United States has increased to 7,038 with a total death at 97; and

WHEREAS, with the advancement in testing of COVID-19 in the past week, the COVID-19 Whitehouse Task Force as well as the CDC is predicting that the amount of confirmed cases in the United States will increase rapidly in the next four to five days; and

WHEREAS, no vaccine or drug is currently available to cure or combat COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, as of March 18, 2020 at 4 p.m. EST there are at least 3 persons in Okaloosa County and 314 persons in the State of Florida who have tested positive for COVID-19 with an unknown number of persons awaiting testing or awaiting testing results; and

WHEREAS, Okaloosa County is threatened by COVID-19 because of the apparent ability of the virus to spread rapidly among humans, and COVID-19 thereby constitutes a clear and present threat to the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens and visitors of Okaloosa County; and

WHEREAS, the CDC has issued guidelines for “community mitigation strategies” to limit the spread of COVID-19, including recommendations for social distancing, which has proven to be an effective method for containing COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the Okaloosa County Health Department Director has provided recommendations to the County to further suppress the spread of COVID-19 including the closure of public beaches; and

WHEREAS, on March 9, 2020, Governor DeSantis issued Executive Order Number 20-52 regarding COVID-19, declaring a state of emergency in the State of Florida and authorizing in accordance with Section 252.38, Florida Statutes, each political subdivision within the State to “waive the procedures and formalities otherwise required of the political subdivision by law pertaining to ... [the] [p]erformance of public work and taking whatever prudent action is necessary to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of the community;” and

WHEREAS, on March 17, 2020, Governor DeSantis issued Executive Order Number 20-68 regarding COVID-19, closing Bars, Pubs and Nightclubs and limited gatherings of people on beaches and in restaurants; and

WHEREAS, on March 17, 2020, Governor DeSantis at a press conference discussing Executive Order Number 20-68 states that the Order was the “floor for Florida for the foreseeable future” and he encouraged communities to go further with regulations if needed; and

WHEREAS, on March 17, 2020, the Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners declared a local state of emergency; and

WHEREAS, the Whitehouse Taskforce on COVID-19 cautioned on March 18, 2020, that younger people are not taking seriously the need to social distance as they do not fall into the highest risk groups for COVID-19 and as a result other countries are beginning to see an increase in the number of young people becoming seriously ill in the ICUs; and

WHEREAS, due to universities closings and spring break there is an overwhelming number of younger individuals on the beaches of Okaloosa County which may jeopardize the health and safety of the County’s citizens; and

WHEREAS, Chapter 9, Article III, Section 9-42, Okaloosa County Code of Ordinances states that in a declared state of emergency the chairman of the Board of County Commissioners, absent a decision made by a vote of the quorum of the board, is empowered to declare a local state of emergency and take prudent action necessary to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of the community.

NOW, THEREFORE, the Board of County Commissioners of Okaloosa County, Florida, does hereby declare and establish that, effective March 21, 2020 through April 30, 2020:

1. The following public properties and facilities are closed:
 - a. Public beaches;
 - b. Public beach accessways;
 - c. Parking areas solely for accessing public beaches;
 - d. County beachfront parks; and
 - e. Okaloosa County pier except for fishing only.

2. Okaloosa County Beach Vending Permits and Crab Island Vending Permits are hereby suspended.


3. The County encourages parties accessing private beaches and Crab Island to follow the CDC guidance by limiting their gatherings to no more than 10 persons.

4. In accordance with Chapter 9, Article III, Okaloosa County Code of Ordinances, any violation of any rule or regulation issued and set forth herein shall be punishable as provided in Section 9-47.

PASSED AND DULY ADOPTED at a meeting of the Board of County Commissioners of Okaloosa County on the 19th day of March, 2020.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OKALOOSA COUNTY, FLORIDA

By: 
Robert A. "Trey" Goodwin III, Chairman

ATTEST: 
By: _____
J. D. Peacock, II, Clerk

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

By: 
Lynn M. Hoshikawa
County Attorney