

United States Senate

April 3, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

We are writing to express our concerns with the Department of the Interior (DOI) continuing the public comment period process during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the extenuating circumstances of this nationwide pandemic and the President's recent extension of social distancing guidelines through April 30th, we are requesting that you suspend upcoming public comment periods, indefinitely extend currently open public comment periods, and suspend any new non-emergency regulations so that the public may have a sufficient opportunity to participate in the notice and comment rulemaking process.

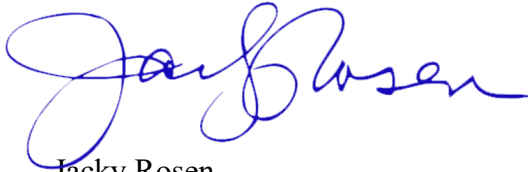
Public comment periods are an incredibly important tool for ensuring that the public has a role in making federal decisions with significant environmental, economic, and cultural impacts. While the goal of agencies seeking public comment is robust public engagement in rulemaking, the COVID-19 public health crisis has made such participation substantially more difficult. COVID-19 is impacting millions of people in their personal and professional lives, including limiting individuals from fully engaging in the public comment period process.

Indefinitely extending open public comment periods and suspending upcoming comment periods in response would be in step with other actions taken by federal, state, and local government. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended that no more than ten individuals gather at one time. Many states have closed schools and non-essential businesses, and also banned public gatherings. State and local governments, business owners, non-profits, and public land and resource users are rightly focusing their attention today on responding to the public health and economic impacts of COVID-19, not agency rulemaking. To actively continue public comment periods during this time would thus risk excluding much of the public from meaningfully participating in the decision-making process.

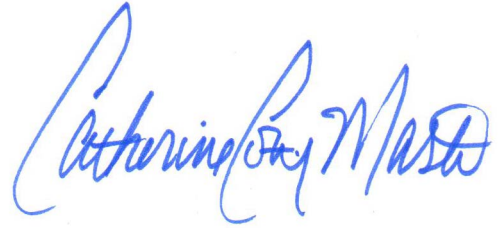
Therefore, we respectfully ask DOI to only consider emergency regulations and related agency actions during this public health crisis.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator