

**PIERCE COUNTY
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

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Media Release

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On July 28th, 2020, the Pierce County Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance to adopt existing state statute regarding the duties of the local health officer related to communicable diseases. This ordinance was proposed to introduce a civil penalty to replace the criminal penalty in the state statute.

“The Pierce County Board passed this ordinance so it could be used in a critical situation, when immediate action has to be taken. We don’t have any communicable diseases orders in place right now, and our health officer has no plans to issue any orders any time soon. What happens now is that we continue like we have been doing: we follow the advisory we’ve used since the spring, and that does not include any enforcement components,” said Jeff Holst, County Board Chair.

“A lot of misinformation was circulated on social media about this ordinance, and that raised issues for some members of the public. The facts are that local health officers have used this decades-old authority to stop the spread of diseases like pertussis and measles. This ordinance is not an expansion of the local health officer’s authority. All it does is add a different, and less serious enforcement mechanism than what was previously available to us through the state statute. The local health officer reports to the Board, and we have oversight over her performance, which includes oversight of how she handles communicable diseases,” said Ruth Wood, chair of the Board of Health.

Board members who supported the ordinance did so mainly so that emergency measures can be taken in case the COVID-19 situation starts to overburden our local hospital and public health capacity. Until an emergency situation arises, Pierce County will focus on hot spots to try to control the spread of disease—just as we’re doing now. “We’ve been clear with our health officer that for now, she needs to focus on controlling COVID-19 by focusing on outbreaks. She and the Board agree that at this time, a broad order is not desirable or likely enforceable” said Jon Aubart, Board Supervisor and Vice-Chair of the County Board.

During the meeting on the 28th, Pierce County Health Officer, AZ Snyder explained that enforcement and orders are a last resort. “Public health uses many tools to protect our communities from disease. Education, engagement and empowerment are our first lines of defense. But in certain situations, enforcement is a vital tool when these efforts have failed. The local health officer can already issue fines under other ordinances, like those regulating restaurants, but we haven’t had to in many years because we make every effort to support voluntary compliance and have had good results with local cooperation.”