

Dear Supervisor McCowen and the Board of Supervisors,

I am writing to advocate for the opening of parks and beaches in our county.

Thank you for all the public service you are providing. It is with gratitude that I wish you and your loved ones well while you are out working to help mitigate the potential hazards that could create a health crisis here, as has sadly happened to so places around the world.

With that fact in mind, I want to express my concern for the mental (as well as physical) health and well-being of the many children and families who have been largely housebound for six weeks. The toll this is taking has yet to be measured, but there is little doubt that the combination of anxiety and fear, economic stressors and inability to get out and play is a pressure cooker situation for many. We have all seen the data that domestic violence related calls to law enforcement have increased. And also of great concern are all the children who are at home, and not only away from school and friends, but out of the eye of mandated reporters. I am afraid they may be suffering the brunt of overwhelmed parents who may have few resources and already challenged coping capacities.

I believe we need a more nuanced approach to social distancing with contextual considerations. We are a rural county, not densely populated, and we have lots of open space. Space where children and families (and those without children and families) could get out and recreate/play and breathe a little. I am referring to parks and open spaces such as Low Gap, our beaches, and other places where there are trails to walk and areas where people who already live together can have a picnic, throw a frisbee, kick a ball around, and enjoy nature. There is plenty of space for our County residents, including in-landers driving to the coast to enjoy the beach for the day. Places like Vinewood and Todd Grove could accommodate many individual families/people who live together and still have adequate space separating them.

This is a very tricky situation, rife with risk, and no doubt it must be very difficult to be in the position of creating policy. However, long term sheltering in place is/will likely exact a toll on our community's physical and emotional well-being. To be sure, it is a delicate balancing act with a potential price to pay on both ends. I know relaxing the shelter in place restrictions means people would have to behave responsibly, but I think we can figure out ways to reasonably safely expand access to parks, beaches and other select open spaces. With caution and consideration for the well-being of all, I request we find more ways to allow Mendocino County citizens to take advantage of the wonderful resources we are so fortunate to have in our rural county.

I hope I sound both rational and reasonable as I make this request of you as our Supervisors. Please advocate for the re-opening of areas both within the County jurisdiction and the City of Ukiah for our County residents.

Thanks again for all you're doing for us.

My best,

Sam Fernandez, LCSW