



# California Legislature

May 6, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
State Capitol, First Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Including Houses of Worship in Stage 2 of Reopening**

Dear Governor Newsom,

As the vast majority of Californians continue to demonstrate personal responsibility in abiding by recommended health guidelines to slow the spread of the pandemic, we would encourage you to consider adjusting your “Resilience Roadmap Stages” to include in-person religious services at houses of worship in Stage 2 of this plan rather than in Stage 3.

By and large, pastors and congregations across the state have suspended in-person religious services, pursuant to state and local orders, since the middle of March. They recognize the need to not only protect the health and safety of their congregants, but also that of the communities they serve.

According to your administration’s roadmap, these institutions are currently slated to reopen during Stage 3, which we understand could still be many weeks, if not months, into the future. At the same time, schools, which are gathering places for large numbers of individuals, are included under Stage 2. If schools can open while still exercising appropriate physical distancing and other precautions, it seems houses of worship, many of which have fewer people on-site for a typical service than local public schools have on normal weekdays, should be able to assemble while taking steps necessary to keep their congregations safe.

Californians, church-attending and otherwise, have expressed that they want to see the state reopen altogether. It is a sentiment sure to grow as stay home orders remain in effect. Rather than put off religious services to Stage 3, when there is no aspirational timeline in place as to when it would begin, we would urge the adoption of a phased-in approach to begin reopening houses of worship during Stage 2 with clear guidance issued based on best practices.

Further, at a time when Californians are feeling more lonely or isolated, communities of faith can help combat depression and other mental health challenges brought on by the pandemic and ensuing response, as highlighted by your administration. While ministry teams serve as critical bridges to check in on members and neighbors to maintain connection, there is still no

replacement for gatherings in person, even under social distancing guidelines, that for many are a touchstone of their week.

Other states, including Texas, have made accommodations and promoted health guidance for houses of worship that safeguard public health while enabling Americans to exercise their First Amendment rights, the protection of which need constant reassurance, especially at a time of greater government involvement in our day-to-day lives. [We have enclosed a copy for your review and consideration.](#)

Please let us know if you would like to discuss this matter further. Thank you for your attention to this pressing concern.

Sincerely,



**MIKE MORRELL**  
Senator, 23<sup>rd</sup> District



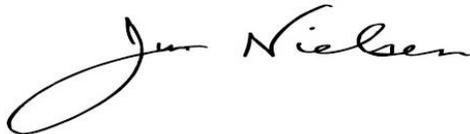
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\*Amended May 8, 2020 with additional signatures.