

Resolution 2022-11

CORONAVIRUS GLOBAL PANDEMIC

BACKGROUND

In December 2019, the World Health Organization warned that a new unknown virus appeared to be spreading from a live animal market in Wuhan, China. In early January 2020, scientists identify the virus as a novel coronavirus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome, naming it SARS-CoV-2. This coronavirus causes a disease named COVID-19.

Since it surfaced, over 612 million people worldwide have been infected with the coronavirus and over 6.5 million have died. The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the United States was January 21, 2020 in Washington state. Almost 3 years later, the United States has the highest number of COVID-19 cases globally, with almost 96 million cases and over 1 million deaths.

Montana's first case of coronavirus was confirmed on March 13, the day after Governor Bullock declared a state of emergency. To date, Montana has had a total of 305,000 cases and over 3,500 deaths.

Major economic upheaval resulted from actions taken to protect public health across the United States and globally. The coronavirus pandemic triggered the sharpest economic contraction in modern American history, with GDP falling 33% in the spring of 2020. Consumer spending tumbled and the national debt surged as a result of congressional attempts to alleviate the immediate impacts of the pandemic. Unemployment rose to over 15% in the spring of 2020, with all but 3 states recording their highest rate ever in 2020.

Montana had one of the strongest economic rebounds from the COVID-19 pandemic of any state in the country. Since the pandemic began, Montana has had the fifth fastest employment growth rate in the nation, the seventh highest growth rate in GDP, and the fifteenth lowest unemployment rate. Much of these economic gains have been offset by inflation, however, with prices in the Western U.S. increasing 8% since August 2021. Due in part to inflation, higher wages in Montana resulted in a budget surplus for the 2023 biennium at over \$1.5 billion.

During the pandemic and despite rapidly fluctuating public health and economic conditions, municipalities continued to provide the public safety and critical services critical to our local communities and economy, including police, fire, emergency response, and education.

ACTIONS

The League recognizes the lives lost to and the long-term public health impacts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. As Montana, the nation, and the world emerge from the pandemic, the League will support bills or policies that:

1. Help local governments continue to provide critical public safety services in our local communities, including increased revenues, direct federal support, and flexible financial regulations.

2. Invest in improving and maintaining Montana's infrastructure.
3. Provide maximum local authority and flexibility to make emergency decisions to protect the public health and safety of our residents.
4. Expand and improve technology that allows municipalities to better respond to future similar emergency situations, including tools that ensure the public can access government services, the municipality can continue to conduct business, and staff can provide critical public services.
5. Support creation of a statewide monument recognizing the Montanans lost to COVID-19 and the sacrifices of those working in the health care industry.
6. Support a major incident review of Montana's response to the pandemic at all levels of government, identify lessons learned in responding to the pandemic, and make recommendations for improvements to better equip all levels of government to respond to public health emergencies.

The League will oppose bills or policies that:

1. Undermine or restrict local governments' ability to provide critical public safety services or make local decisions to protect public health and safety.