



State of New Mexico

Michelle Lujan Grisham
Governor

July 21, 2020

Dear Regents, Governing Board Members and Administrators,

Every day we are learning new things about COVID-19 and the awful, lethal consequences of the illness it causes. One certainty is that the virus does not always present symptoms for infected individuals. Another is that no one is immune. Not long ago, two New Mexicans in their 30s succumbed to COVID-19 on the same day, one of them with no underlying health conditions. As I've presented publicly, almost half of our state's newly identified cases – one of the key factors driving the state's frighteningly consistent rise in cases over the past weeks – are individuals between the ages of 20 and 39. Even if younger individuals do not succumb to the virus, their bodies are too often indelibly harmed, forever scarred. And anyone who contracts the virus is at risk of spreading it to someone else – a family member, a colleague, anyone with whom they come into close contact – whether they know they have contracted it or not.

Indeed, this virus continues to menace our nation and state, including higher education institutions. The decisions I have had to make throughout this pandemic have been difficult and I know you have been presented similarly difficult challenges in your leadership roles during this crisis. But as leaders we must continue to protect the health and well-being of the communities we serve. Those tough decisions, no matter how complex or how popular, must be made; the health and safety of those who look to us for leadership are and must continue to be our collective top priorities. It is therefore critical that you postpone collegiate athletics in this moment of escalating danger. This is an essential step we must take if we are to return to some safe and balanced new normal as quickly as possible. We must fight this virus with all the tools at our disposal – including physical distancing and the avoidance of close contact with others – so we can regain control of the spread and resume the daily activities that have been torn from us during this pandemic. The potential for contact sports later in the year or early in 2021 would of course be one of those activities.

We are seeing too many positive cases at businesses and institutions all across New Mexico. Higher education institutions are no exception. The tight-knit communities in which our schools operate will be at risk if the virus is given the opportunity to take root. Sports, especially contact sports, are unsafe at this point in time for that very reason; they are a risk we cannot afford to take given how many people would be endangered by the inevitable spread of COVID-19 in these environments: The coaches, the trainers, the campus communities at large. Every decision you make, I know, is made with their well-being and the collective well-being of your collegiate communities front of mind. This is no exception. I expect and appreciate your compliance in keeping our communities healthy and safe during this pandemic.

I know what I am asking you to contemplate is difficult and unprecedented, but these are difficult and unprecedented times. Fighting COVID-19 is a team sport. I am asking each of you to join me and take it upon yourselves to do everything you can to fight COVID-19. Together we can protect all New Mexicans, and if we are successful, we can resume contact sports and re-engage in the camaraderie and joy they bring all of us in a safe manner as soon as we can.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Lujan Grisham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michelle Lujan Grisham
Governor