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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CEO informs employees of new Executive Order from Office of The Governor

*Pandemic measure will strengthen enforcement
of face covering requirement in all indoor public spaces*

EAGLE LAKE, Maine (Dec. 11, 2020) – Following news yesterday that Aroostook County’s COVID-19 positivity rate has soared, CEO Michelle Raymond encouraged her administrative team to communicate to employees today that Maine Gov. Janet Mills has ordered the enforcement of mask wearing in indoor public places. Raymond forwarded a State of Maine press release about Mills’ actions today, and expressed her pleasure that so many groups, including disability rights advocates, are supportive of this additional pandemic measure to reduce exposure to the deadly COVID-19. That press release (minus some external links) is here, in its entirety:

“Governor Mills Issues Executive Order Strengthening Enforcement of Face Covering Requirement in All Indoor Public Spaces

December 11, 2020 – With widespread community transmission and increased COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in Maine, Governor Janet Mills today [signed an Executive Order \(PDF\)](#) that simplifies and strengthens the enforcement of the State’s face covering requirement. Moving forward, owners and operators of all indoor public spaces – regardless of the type of entity or size – must not allow those who refuse to wear a face covering to enter or remain in their venue. Previous Executive Orders had required enforcement in some but not all public settings.

Additionally, the Governor announced she has recently dedicated \$100,000 in CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) to continue the State’s “Keep It Maine” public

Our mission is to provide individuals with the highest standard of care and help all of the people we serve enjoy life to the fullest potential.

awareness campaign about the importance of taking seriously health and safety precautions, such as wearing a face covering, staying six feet apart, and washing hands often.

The Governor also warned that more severe restrictions, including reduced gathering limits or business closures, might be necessary to gain better control of the spread of COVID-19, although these are options of last resort especially given the lack of federal support for workers and businesses.

“Short of closing businesses and schools and requiring people to stay home, which is the last thing I want to do, especially during the holidays, we are running out of available public health tools to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in Maine. Hospitalizations are on the rise, more people are getting sick, and more people are dying,” **said Governor Mills**. “We know masks can stop the spread. But we need people to wear them. This Executive Order is aimed at ensuring that we are protecting people in stores, protecting store employees, and keeping Maine people healthy.”

Wearing a face covering is proven to significantly reduce the spread of COVID-19 and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has called on all Americans to wear masks to prevent COVID-19 spread. In Maine, people in a public setting are required to wear a face covering. Previously, retail stores with more than 50,000 square feet of shopping space – along with eating establishments, bars, tasting rooms, social clubs, and lodging operations and accommodations – required customers to wear face coverings and could deny entry if patrons refused. Now, all owners and operators of indoor public spaces, regardless of the type of entity or its size, must deny entry to those who refuse. Earlier this week, Governor Mills convened a call with retail stores to discuss this change and communicated that enhanced enforcement was necessary to protect Maine people.

“Maine's retailers, grocers and restaurants employ one in four Maine workers. That means you have a family member, a friend or a neighbor that is relying on that job to survive,” **said Curtis Picard, President & CEO of Retail Association of Maine**. “If you don't wear a mask, don't try to enter a store. It's that simple: No Mask, No Service, No Exceptions.”

“Maine businesses take very seriously their role in following critical health precautions and protocols, especially with the recent rise in COVID-19 cases,” **said Dana Connors, President of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce**. “Protecting the health of Maine people and our state's workforce also protects Maine's economic health, and wearing a mask is one of the easiest and most effective ways to do that. This is simple: if you care about Maine businesses, you will wear a mask.”

“This is another important step in slowing the spread of COVID-19, protecting employees, and keeping Maine businesses open,” **said Heather Johnson, Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development**. “It is important that all people of Maine take this responsibility seriously and do their part by wearing a mask every time they leave their home.”

The Executive Order also clarifies that claiming a medical exemption is not an excuse to enter or remain in an establishment without a face covering. This comes in light of reports from retailers of individuals abusing the exemption. Reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities exist to protect such individuals as well as others from COVID-19 in public settings.

“People with disabilities, myself included, reject recent attempts to misappropriate our identities and misuse our vitally important and hard-fought civil rights protections, as a form of misguided civil disobedience,” **said Kim Moody, Executive Director of Disability Rights Maine.** “The vast majority of Maine people with disabilities wear face coverings when in the community because it is safer, and it is smart. And we want others to do the same, because many of us have compromised immune systems or are otherwise in high-risk categories.”

Additionally, municipalities, which are authorized to enforce the use of face coverings on streets and sidewalks, in parks and in other public spaces like town halls where individuals gather, are also required to deny entry to indoor public spaces to those who will not wear face coverings.

“As Maine’s coronavirus cases multiply, municipal officials across the state urge citizens to wear masks to protect their fellow Mainers who include municipal workers providing critical local services,” **said Christine Landes, President of Maine Municipal Association and Gardiner City Manager.** “Please help protect those who protect and serve us - our first responders, snowplow drivers, clerks and other town and city employees by following Governor Mills’ simplified masking orders.”

While the State always seeks voluntary compliance first, and is encouraged by the great majority of Maine people and businesses who are taking the virus seriously, the Mills Administration has communicated with law enforcement entities, many of whom stand ready to assist store employees if they encounter difficulty enforcing the face covering requirement.

“Wearing a face covering is a simple step you can take to reduce the spread of COVID-19. In a public setting, wearing a face covering not only makes good sense, but is required and enforceable through licensing actions, by law enforcement, and by the Attorney General,” **said Aaron Frey, Attorney General of Maine.** “The Governor’s executive order makes clear that all operators of indoor public spaces must comply with and enforce the requirement.”

“Our fundamental mission is to protect the safety of the people of Maine,” **said Chief Roland Lacroix, President of the Maine Chiefs of Police Association.** “We support the Governor’s Executive Order and stand ready to assist its enforcement to protect Maine people.”

“Wearing a mask is not only the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19, it’s also the law,” **said Maeghan Maloney, District Attorney for Kennebec and Somerset Counties and President of the Maine Prosecutors Association.** “We take seriously our

duty to enforce the law, and we are prepared to take action against those who put the health and safety of other Maine people at risk during this pandemic.”

In the event of non-compliance with enforcement, the State has the option of taking action against a facility’s operating license, and violations of Executive Orders are a Class E crime, punishable by up to 180 days imprisonment and \$1,000 fine. Those who are made aware of the face covering requirement and insist on entering an establishment can be removed and charged with trespassing by law enforcement.

Additionally, the Governor has recently dedicated \$100,000 in CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) to the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to continue its “Keep It Maine” campaign. The campaign will promote messages from people directly affected by COVID-19 to convey the importance of taking basic public health precautions. Additionally, DHHS is supporting “Holiday Ambassadors,” similar to this summer’s “Beach Ambassadors,” to provide information and face coverings in shopping areas in Portland and other sites through the season.

“It’s vital that Maine people stick to the steps we know limit the spread of COVID-19 – wearing a face covering, staying six feet apart, and washing hands often,” **said Jeanne Lambrew, Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services.** “The more we contain the virus now, the more effective our vaccination effort will be. Let’s keep it up. Let’s Keep it Maine.”

“Wearing face coverings in public, staying at least six feet apart, and avoiding non-essential interaction with people who are not members of your household are the best tools that Maine people have to protect themselves and others from the virus,” **said Dr. Nirav D. Shah, Director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention.** “A growing body of research indicates that wearing a face covering not only reduces the chance that you could spread the virus to others; it can reduce your risk of infection if you are exposed to the virus.”

Maine’s number of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations have increased significantly over the past month while the state’s 7-day positivity rate, although lower than other states, stands at 4.70 over the past seven days, a substantial increase from 2.47 of a month ago.”