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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Leelanau Dems, Supporting Health and Safety of County Residents,  
Reject Sheriff's Dangerous Shirking of Pandemic Guidelines**

Empire, Mich.—Today Leelanau County Democrats declare their deep concern about the health, safety, and welfare of county residents. We are responding to Leelanau County Sheriff Mike Borkovich's April 15 announcement that he will break state law and ignore health department guidelines regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the worst we have faced in this country since 1918. It has already killed more people than in the Pearl Harbor attacks or attacks on September 11, 2001. There is no proven treatment nor vaccine. The only weapon we have is to stay away from others. While Michigan does not have the same testing rate as other states, it does have the distinction of having the highest death rate per diagnosed case (2093 deaths in 29,263 cases, 7%).

The party condemns Sheriff Borkovich's dangerous, unlawful decision to defy Michigan's corona virus orders, which are slowing the spread of this highly contagious disease in our state. Those orders are a major reason why the virus has not yet challenged our county's health care system.

The statement at hand, made in league with the sheriffs of Benzie, Manistee, and Mason counties, states that each sheriff took oaths to defend the Michigan and United States Constitutions. That includes the laws of Michigan and the United States. While any individual can find any law objectionable, the job of the sheriff is to enforce the laws.

The letter calls Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer's directives vague and self-contradictory, but raises no specific objections. Sheriff Borkovich states he will not strictly enforce the governor's orders but promises to pick and choose from among the guidelines. It is unclear when or if medical or scientific considerations will guide his decisions.

The statement reflects the opinion that the focus needs to be on "reopening" and getting people back to work. We agree with Sheriff Borkovich that getting people back to work is important, but fail to see how this fits in his job description. The best way to get people back to work is to increase reliable testing for the disease, track and isolate every case, and evaluate every contact for every case.

- While the virus spread seem to be slowing in some places, diagnosed cases have not appreciably declined in Michigan. The fact that we know of only 6 cases in Leelanau County does not justify easing restrictions without medical guidance. One case may easily spread the disease to 3 or more people, and likewise those people to at least 3 others each. We have been relatively lucky so far, but any sense of relief about that is dangerous, because our people are highly vulnerable to COVID 19. Health care personnel across the country and the world make up 10-20% of infections, at least half of which are job-related. We need to keep healthcare workers and our first responders, grocery workers, law enforcement personnel and others safe – we need them.
- Leelanau County has no acute care or intensive care facilities. The closest ones are in Traverse City. Current experience indicates our hospitals will be overwhelmed within three weeks if the virus spreads without strict stay-at-home enforcement.
- There is no known treatment for severe COVID-19. Patients can deteriorate rapidly, and high-level, intensive care is available only in Traverse City. There is no quick prospect of a vaccine.
- The fatality rate will likely be higher in Leelanau County because the population is older, and hypertension, asthma diabetes, and heart disease—serious COVID19 risk factors—are more common here.
- Though more testing has only recently become available, only symptomatic people who have a doctor's order can get COVID19 tests here, so we simply do not know who has it.
- The World Health Organization lists six conditions to be met before restrictions can be relaxed. None of these are currently met anywhere in Michigan.

We urge the Leelanau County Prosecutor and the Michigan Attorney General to evaluate the legality of Sheriff Borkovich's deeply irresponsible proclamation. The sheriff should know that such behavior could submit him and the county to serious legal and financial liability.

We urge the sheriff to withdraw this anti-science, anti-public safety policy before it causes immense damage, pain, heartbreak, expense, and death in the county we love.

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