GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

March 2, 2021

FILED IN THE OFFICE OF THE
SECRETARY OF STATE
1:15 PM O'CLOCK

MAR 02 2021

Secretary of State

The Honorable Ruth R. Hughs
Secretary of State
State Capitol Room 1E.8
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Secretary Hughs:

Pursuant to his powers as Governor of the State of Texas, Greg Abbott has issued the following:

> Executive Order No. GA-34 relating to the opening of Texas in response to the COVID-19 disaster.

The original executive order is attached to this letter of transmittal.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Davidson
Executive Clerk to the Governor

GSD/gsd

Attachment

Executive Order

BY THE
GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF TEXAS

Executive Department
Austin, Texas
March 2, 2021

EXECUTIVE ORDER
GA 34

Relating to the opening of Texas in response to the COVID-19 disaster.

WHEREAS, I, Greg Abbott, Governor of Texas, issued a disaster proclamation on March 13, 2020, certifying under Section 418.014 of the Texas Government Code that the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) poses an imminent threat of disaster for all counties in the State of Texas; and

WHEREAS, in each subsequent month effective through today, I have renewed the disaster declaration for all Texas counties; and

WHEREAS, I have issued executive orders and suspensions of Texas laws in response to COVID-19, aimed at protecting the health and safety of Texans and ensuring an effective response to this disaster; and

WHEREAS, I issued Executive Order GA-08 on March 19, 2020, mandating social-distancing restrictions in accordance with guidelines promulgated by President Donald J. Trump and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); and

WHEREAS, I subsequently issued a series of superseding executive orders aiming to achieve the least restrictive means of combatting the evolving threat to public health by adjusting social-distancing restrictions while implementing a safe, strategic plan to reopen Texas; and

WHEREAS, under Executive Order GA-32, in effect since October 14, 2020, most establishments have been able to operate up to at least 75 percent of total occupancy, except in some areas with high hospitalizations as defined in that order, where most establishments have been able to operate up to at least 50 percent of total occupancy; and

WHEREAS, I also issued Executive Order GA-29, regarding the use of face coverings to control the spread of COVID-19, and a series of executive orders, most recently GA-31, limiting certain medical surgeries and procedures; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 hospitalizations and the rate of new COVID-19 cases have steadily declined due to the millions of Texans who have voluntarily been vaccinated, many more who are otherwise immune, improved medical treatments for COVID-19 patients, abundant supplies of testing and personal protective equipment, and Texans' adherence to safe practices like social distancing, hand sanitizing, and use of face coverings; and

WHEREAS, in the Texas Disaster Act of 1975, the legislature charged the governor with the responsibility "for meeting … the dangers to the state and people presented by

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disasters" under Section 418.011 of the Texas Government Code, and expressly granted the governor broad authority to fulfill that responsibility; and

WHEREAS, under Section 418.012, the "governor may issue executive orders ... hav[ing] the force and effect of law;"

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Greg Abbott, Governor of Texas, by virtue of the power and authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the State of Texas, and in accordance with guidance from medical advisors, do hereby order the following on a statewide basis effective at 12:01 a.m. on March 10, 2021:

1. In all counties not in an area with high hospitalizations as defined below:
   a. there are no COVID-19-related operating limits for any business or other establishment; and
   b. individuals are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings over the nose and mouth wherever it is not feasible to maintain six feet of social distancing from another person not in the same household, but no person may be required by any jurisdiction to wear or to mandate the wearing of a face covering.

   "Area with high hospitalizations" means any Trauma Service Area that has had seven consecutive days in which the number of COVID-19 hospitalized patients as a percentage of total hospital capacity exceeds 15 percent, until such time as the Trauma Service Area has seven consecutive days in which the number of COVID-19 hospitalized patients as a percentage of total hospital capacity is 15 percent or less. A current list of areas with high hospitalizations will be maintained at www.dshs.texas.gov/ga3031.

2. In any county located in an area with high hospitalizations as defined above:
   a. there are no state-imposed COVID-19-related operating limits for any business or other establishment;
   b. there is no state-imposed requirement to wear a face covering; and
   c. the county judge may use COVID-19-related mitigation strategies; *provided, however, that*:
      i. business and other establishments may not be required to operate at less than 50 percent of total occupancy, with no operating limits allowed to be imposed for religious services (including those conducted in churches, congregations, and houses of worship), public and private schools and institutions of higher education, and child-care services;
      ii. no jurisdiction may impose confinement in jail as a penalty for violating any order issued in response to COVID-19; and
      iii. no jurisdiction may impose a penalty of any kind for failure to wear a face covering or failure to mandate that customers or employees wear face coverings, except that a legally authorized official may act to enforce trespassing laws and remove violators at the request of a business establishment or other property owner.

3. In providing or obtaining services, every person (including individuals, businesses, and other legal entities) is strongly encouraged to use good-faith efforts and available resources to follow the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) health recommendations, found at www.dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus.

4. Nothing in this executive order precludes businesses or other establishments from requiring employees or customers to follow additional hygiene measures, including the wearing of a face covering.

5. Nursing homes, state supported living centers, assisted living facilities, and long-

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term care facilities should follow guidance from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) regarding visitations, and should follow infection control policies and practices set forth by HHSC, including minimizing the movement of staff between facilities whenever possible.

6. Public schools may operate as provided by, and under the minimum standard health protocols found in, guidance issued by the Texas Education Agency. Private schools and institutions of higher education are encouraged to establish similar standards.
7. County and municipal jails should follow guidance from the Texas Commission on Jail Standards regarding visitations.
8. Executive Orders GA-17, GA-25, GA-29, and GA-31 are rescinded in their entirety.
9. This executive order shall supersede any conflicting order issued by local officials in response to the COVID-19 disaster, but only to the extent that such a local order restricts services allowed by this executive order or allows gatherings restricted by this executive order. Pursuant to Section 418.016(a) of the Texas Government Code, I hereby suspend Sections 418.1015(b) and 418.108 of the Texas Government Code, Chapter 81, Subchapter E of the Texas Health and Safety Code, and any other relevant statutes, to the extent necessary to ensure that local officials do not impose restrictions in response to the COVID-19 disaster that are inconsistent with this executive order, provided that local officials may enforce this executive order as well as local restrictions that are consistent with this executive order.
10. All existing state executive orders relating to COVID-19 are amended to eliminate confinement in jail as an available penalty for violating the executive orders. To the extent any order issued by local officials in response to the COVID-19 disaster would allow confinement in jail as an available penalty for violating a COVID-19-related order, that order allowing confinement in jail is superseded, and I hereby suspend all relevant laws to the extent necessary to ensure that local officials do not confine people in jail for violating any executive order or local order issued in response to the COVID-19 disaster.

This executive order supersedes Executive Orders GA-17, GA-25, GA-29, GA-31, and GA-32, but does not supersede Executive Orders GA-10 or GA-13. This executive order shall remain in effect and in full force unless it is modified, amended, rescinded, or superseded by the governor. This executive order may also be amended by proclamation of the governor.

Given under my hand this the 2nd day of March, 2021.

GREG ABBOTT
Governor

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ATTESTED BY:

RUTH R. HUGHS
Secretary of State

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