



Suicide Prevention Awareness Week

Governor Ducey addresses mental and behavioral health

In recognition of Suicide Prevention Awareness Week and World Suicide Prevention Day, Governor Ducey joined other leaders to address mental and behavioral health challenges facing our most vulnerable residents. According to state leaders, suicide is the leading cause of death for Arizonans ages 10-14, and nearly 1,500 Arizonans took their own lives in 2019, approximately one suicide every six hours. In the midst of the ongoing pandemic, officials remain concerned that precautions intended to control the spread of COVID-19 are leading to an increased rate of suicide deaths. However, state officials do not have an accurate report of suicide deaths this year because there is a 6-month delay in death-certificate data. Data should be available until 2021.

The Governor also highlighted efforts by the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), which has increased behavioral health resources in schools. Over the last year, clinicians across the state have provided behavioral health services to more 15,000 students on school campuses -- a 28% increase in student access to school-based care.

Several resources to address mental and behavioral health are available statewide including:

- **Resilient Arizona Crisis Counseling Program:** Launched in June, the program uses federal grant funding to provide free and confidential support and referrals to Arizona residents struggling with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Arizonans can access it by dialing 2-1-1.
- **Be Connected Program:** This program aims to prevent veteran suicides by connecting vets with financial assistance, health benefits, emergency housing, jobs and other resources. For information about Be Connected, Arizonans can dial 1-866-4AZ-VETS (429-8387) or click [here](#).

AZDHS issues COVID-19 update

Arizona Department of Health Services (AZDHS) officials reported that COVID-19 related hospitalizations continue to decline as officials prepare for the upcoming flu season. According to AZDHS officials, multiple key metrics about the severity of Arizona's pandemic, including coronavirus-related hospitalizations, are at or near the lowest they've been in months.

AZDHS figures show that 82% of inpatient beds and 78% of ICU beds were in use, which includes people being treated for COVID-19 and other patients. COVID-19 patients were using 7% of all inpatient beds and 10% of ICU beds. Overall, 28% of ventilators were in use. The state has one of the lowest COVID-

19 rates of spread (Rt) in the nation at 0.87 (the average number of people a COVID-positive individual will infect). Of known test results from last week, AZDHS reported that 4% have come back positive. A positivity rate of 5% or less is considered a good indicator that the spread is being controlled.

For more information on free COVID-19 testing sites click [here](#).

Arizona House Democrats release candidates for leadership

A Democrat slate comprised of Representative Diego Espinoza (LD19), Senator Andrea Dalessandro (LD2) and Representative Jennifer Longdon (LD24) announced their candidacy for House majority leadership in the event that the GOP led chamber is overturned this election. Dubbed the “Democratic Unity Team”, they are led by Espinoza who is vying to become House Speaker. He is joined by Dalessandro, a candidate for Majority Whip, and Longdon, a candidate for Majority Leader.

In a statement entitled “*A New Governing Majority Leadership Vision for Democratic Unity: A Better Arizona*”, the team pledged to improve communication and mend intra-caucus divides if they obtain majority control. They wrote, “this undertaking will require a new level of unity, respect, and communication among our caucus and will necessitate the challenging work of navigating a divided government while always staying true to our Democratic values.” They continued, “none of this will be possible unless we first create a strong bond of unity between all Democratic legislators at the Arizona Capitol.”

Seen as a moderate slate, the team will challenge Representative Charlene Fernandez (LD4) and her progressive wing for the leadership positions. Fernandez has been criticized by caucus members for her leadership style and supporting progressive candidates in key primary races against moderate Democrat incumbents. Fernandez would seek to become House Speaker and will run on a progressive slate. She will be joined by Representative Reginald Bolding (LD27), a candidate to serve as Majority Leader, and Representative Raquel Teran (LD30), a candidate to serve as Majority Whip.

Selection of leadership will occur after the general election. As more information becomes available, we will update you.

To review the new Democratic Unity Team website, click [here](#).

To review the Team vision statement, click [here](#).

Unemployment benefit to end

Arizona Department of Economic Security (AZDES) Director Wisheart announced the Lost Wages Assistance (LWA) grant program which allows states to provide unemployed persons \$300 per week in addition to the regular state unemployment benefit has been exhausted.

According to AZDES Director Wisheart, Arizona has authorization from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to pay the supplement this week and is working on authorization to pay it next week; however, it will end after that. Unless Congress acts, nearly 430,000 Arizonans will see their additional weekly benefit decrease from \$540 to \$240 a week.

Director Wisheart also revealed that the state will likely need to borrow from the United States Labor Department (DOL) when the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) runs out in the next 8 weeks. Established by Congress to compensate people who were self-employed, contract workers, or otherwise didn't qualify for regular unemployment; the \$1.1 billion program has \$484 million left, with \$50 million being paid out each week. AZDES is holding onto more than 900,000 PUA applications that are potentially fraudulent. AZDES officials are also

investigating another 131,000 new claims received last week, many of which are suspected to be fraudulent. Since the PUA program began, the agency has reported 30,000 claims of fraud, in addition to the 900,000 claims yet to be reviewed.

As more information becomes available, we will update you.

For more information on unemployment assistance, click [here](#).

Supreme Court overturns ruling on County ballot changes

The Arizona Supreme Court blocked Maricopa County Recorder Adrian Fontes from telling voters how they can correct errors on their ballots.

Maricopa County Recorder Adrian Fontes had issued change instructions before the primary election. Fontes noted that when voters select more than the permitted number of candidates for an office, their votes for that race are discarded. However, when voters make extraneous markings on their ballots, which would include crossing out a candidate and voting for someone else instead, election officials review the ballots to see if they can determine the voter's intent. Fontes concluded that if election officials can discern a voter's intent, which would include crossing out a mistaken vote and choosing a new candidate, the vote is counted.

Arizona Public Integrity Alliance (AZPIA), a conservative political nonprofit disagreed and sent a cease and desist letter to Fontes demanding he stop including the instructions in voter pamphlets. Alexander Kolodin, an attorney who ran against Senator Michelle Ugenti-Rita (LD23) in the primary election this year and lost, sent the letter on behalf of the group. Kolodin wrote that the new instruction "increases the potential for fraud in our elections because anyone in the ballot's chain of custody can alter a vote in a way that is indistinguishable from an alteration made by the voter themselves." Kolodin warned that if Fontes refused to change the instruction, he would file a lawsuit against the Recorder. Subsequently, a lawsuit was filed in Maricopa County Superior Court after Fontes refused to comply with the cease and desist demand.

Maricopa County Superior Court Judge James Smith ruled that Fontes' instructions, which he had already used for the presidential preference election in March and the primary election in August, were likely illegal. But Smith refused to grant a request by AZPIA to block the instructions from going out. Judge Smith pointed out that Fontes already had printed up more than 2 million sheets with the information to go out with early ballots. Smith said that blocking the instructions from going out made no sense, either logistically or financially. AZPIA appealed the ruling to the Arizona Court of Appeals which transferred it to the state Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court overturned Judge Smith's decision and concluded that Fontes and Maricopa County "exceeded their authority" by explicitly instructing voters to cross out their mistakes if they voted for the wrong candidate. In the court order, Chief Justice Robert Brutinel wrote that "while election statutes have changed, the permissible voter instructions ... have not."

In his response to the decision, Fontes stated that he is exploring all options to abide by the court ruling. While the ruling technically affects only Maricopa County, it sends a warning to election officials in the other 14 counties about providing similar advice to their own voters.

To read the Supreme Court decision, click [here](#).

Federal judge issues ruling on election procedures

U.S. District Court Judge Douglas Rayes issued a ruling that will allow Arizona

voters who forget to sign their early ballots before mailing them up to five days after the General Election to fix the problem.

The Arizona Democratic Party, Democratic National Committee and Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee filed suit in Federal court alleging that state election rules allow county recorders five days after the election for voters whose ballot signatures don't match those on file to come to the office and show they actually signed the ballot, similar to people who arrive at the polls to vote in-person but lack required identification.

Judge Rayes agreed and ruled that Arizona law gives people whose signatures on ballot envelopes do not match county records the same five-day grace period to resolve the problem. Rayes wrote, "the state has not shown that continuing to implement these existing cure procedures for an additional five business days after an election is likely to impose meaningful administrative burdens on election officials given the relatively small number of ballots at issue." Rayes pointed out that in 2018, only 2,435 ballots statewide were rejected because they arrived in unsigned envelopes. In addition, Judge Rayes rejected arguments that the deadline is necessary to prevent fraud. He wrote, "the state is not preventing fraud by discarding these ballots without giving voters a meaningful opportunity to supply their missing signatures.

Attorney General Mark Brnovich has filed an appeal in the hope of keeping the ruling from taking effect in this year's General Election. As more information becomes available, we will update you.

To read the original complaint filed by the Democratic groups, click [here](#).

To read the decision by Judge Rayes, click [here](#).



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Arizona Update on Issues



Click here to find COVID-19 resources and volunteer opportunities

Click here to find the AGA 2020 primary analysis

Legislators' Birthdays



Happy Birthday
Senator Karen Fann (R)
Friday, Sept. 25th

Representing LD1, Senator Fann is one of the most respected leaders at the Capitol. The current Senate President and second woman in state history to hold the position, she was first elected to the Legislature in 2011. Prior to running for state office, Fann was Mayor of the Town of Chino Valley and Mayor Pro Temp of the City of Prescott. Owner & CEO of AZ Highway Safety Specialists, INC, Fann has been a vocal advocate for transportation issues across the state. At the Legislature, she serves as Chairman of the Senate Rules committee. Outside of her duties leading the Chamber, she continues to represent her community by serving as a precinct committeeman and is a member of the Rotary International and Elks. To wish President Fann happy birthday:

kfann@azleg.gov



Happy Birthday
Senator Sally Gonzales (D)
Friday, October 2nd

Representing LD3, Senator Gonzales is serving her first term in the Senate. First elected to the House of Representatives in 1997 and later 2015, Gonzales is an educator. After leaving the legislature in 2000, she continued within her profession, serving as the Education Director of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe. Her professional experience includes teaching, teacher training and administration for Tucson Unified School District, Tempe Elementary Schools, Arizona State University, and University of Arizona. At the Legislature, Gonzales is a member of the Senate Commerce, Education and Higher Education committees. This session, her top legislative priority was SB1562 which would have appropriated \$3 million from the general fund to support three tribal higher education institutions. To wish Senator Gonzales happy birthday:

sgonzales@azleg.gov

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