To the Residents of the Fox Valley Region,

From March through August, we fared better against the coronavirus than many other parts of the country. We avoided dangerous surges of infections that would have overwhelmed our hospitals and forced broad closures of businesses. We kept the spread of the virus under control through rigorous planning, strong partnerships among local organizations, and a real commitment from all of us to move forward safely, together.

During the spring and summer, enough of us were doing the things we have to do to fight the virus: wearing face coverings, avoiding large gatherings, practicing physical distancing and maintaining good hygiene. We saw the benefits of our individual and collective effort – our economy began to recover, our hospitals resumed services that were temporarily put on hold, and most importantly, fewer people were getting infected.

But things have changed in the last several weeks and now we are at risk of losing all of the valuable ground we held against the coronavirus these past six months. Today, too many are not following the guidelines outlined by local hospitals, public health officials, physicians and nurses, the CDC, and other health care experts. Instead we’re giving in to caution-fatigue and putting ourselves and others at risk.

We know this because today, our “R Number” (the rate that COVID-19 is replicating – or spreading – in our community) is higher than it has been at any point since this is all started. And it’s going up. Our R Number is one of the most important pieces of information in gauging the status of the pandemic in our area because it measures the rate at which the virus is spreading, not just the number of infections. It tells us when we’re giving the virus too many places to go.

Right now, we have an R Number approaching 1.6. When the number is above 1, it means the virus is spreading quickly and we have widespread community transmission. Our goal is to get to below 1. This would mean fewer people becoming infected and the community spread will slow down.

Of course, this is not about numbers, it’s about people. Our friends, families, neighbors, colleagues and others who call the Fox Valley region home. People are suffering and they don’t have to. Our health care workers can help them when they need it, but it’s up to each of us to keep our loved ones and others out of the hospital. It’s up to us to keep our businesses open and our kids in school.

In order to turn this around and keep moving forward safely, we need to band together again and look at what we are doing. Ask yourself, “What am I doing differently? What manageable changes can I make to help get my community back on track?”

We have a duty to re-double our individual and collective efforts. Let’s recommit to protecting ourselves and our community. We need to do what we know works: Wear face coverings. Practice physical distancing. Avoid group gatherings. Maintain good hygiene.

We, as signatories of this letter, have a shared commitment to the health, wellbeing and strength of our communities. We are like-minded organizations and individuals dedicated to safeguarding our community’s health, supporting our schools, bolstering our economy by amplifying the importance of a sustained pledge to safe behaviors in the evolving fight against COVID-19.

Please join us to help our community move forward safely, together.

We can do it. We’ve done it before.

Help spread the word about what we need to do by sharing what you are doing to stay safe using #besafewisconsin and/or the Be Safe Pledge.

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