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March 26, 2020

The Honorable JT Surles
Chairman, Jefferson County Board of Commissioners
PO Box 1799
Quincy, FL 32353

Dear Commissioner Surles:

On behalf of the over 1,800 members of the Tallahassee Board of REALTORS® (TBR), I would like to thank you for your leadership and diligent attention to the issues affecting Jefferson County during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As the voice for real estate in Jefferson, Gadsden, Leon, and Wakulla Counties we value your commitment.

As the pandemic continues, the economic ramifications are becoming clear. TBR is concerned that interruption to certain essential government services could have severe negative economic ramifications for our neighbors at a time when they are already under stress. As you know, the real estate industry is central to the overall health of the economy.

In particular, we request that you consider real estate transactions and title recording be declared as essential services which should remain active, with steps taken in order to minimize any risk to workers. These businesses provide services that are legally mandated by contract and they work with the financial industry in processing escrow payments. In addition, we request that the recording and other work of the Jefferson County Clerk of Court be declared an essential service which should remain open. Steps to ensure safety could include permitting recording of documents only submitted online or through electronic platforms, and by mail or in-person delivery by appointment only, with appropriate safeguards, for the duration of the crisis.

The reasons for this are self-evident. In the absence of a functioning county recorder, real estate transactions, many of which are already in progress, might not be able to be closed. This would result in additional and significant hardships to the persons involved, especially those who are buying and/or selling a home. Also, with record low interest rates, there is likely going to be an opportunity for many Jefferson County homeowners to refinance at the lower rates, which would provide immediate economic relief to homeowners dealing with the challenges of these times. Without a functioning recorder's office, that opportunity could be lost.

I respectfully request that the County Commission ensure that any emergency orders that are pending declare that the work of the Clerk of Court is an essential service and that the Clerk's office remain open and continue to conduct business, of course with safeguards for their employees, during the ongoing crisis.

In these difficult times, we know the economic ramifications of this pandemic will be substantial, but believe this step will help to support our neighbors and local businesses involved in real estate and lending transactions, and the economy as a whole.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicholas Mihalich'.

Nicholas Mihalich, President
Tallahassee Board of REALTORS®