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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Bell County No Longer a High Hospitalization Area
Bars May Re-open, Restaurants May Increase Occupancy Capacity

Belton, TX – On Tuesday, February 9, Bell County Judge David Blackburn received a letter from Dr. John Hellerstedt, Commissioner of the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), stating that Bell County is no longer considered to have a high COVID-19 hospitalization rate. This change in designation impacts a variety of Bell County businesses, including area hospitals, restaurants, and bars.

"It is very encouraging to see our COVID-19 hospitalization rates have dropped," Judge Blackburn said. "I know there are many Bell County businesses that are eager to re-open to higher occupancy levels."

This letter from DSHS means that area hospitals are now free to resume elective surgeries. Certain Bell County venues may now reopen to 75% capacity levels as allowed under GA-32. Additionally, Judge Blackburn filed the necessary paperwork with the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC) to allow the re-opening of bars and similar establishments in Bell County. He submitted that paperwork this morning.

Dr. Hellerstedt's letter confirms that, based on records kept by DSHS, for the last 7 consecutive days in Trauma Service Area L, of which Bell is one of 6 member counties, the number of COVID-19 hospitalized patients has not exceeded 15% of hospital capacities. Based on that criteria, laid out in Governor Greg Abbott's Executive Order GA-32 in October, Bell County no longer meets the definition of a high hospitalization area.

"I want to continue to urge the people of Bell County to continue practicing social-distancing, mask wearing, and good personal hygiene," Judge Blackburn said. "These measures have, no doubt, contributed to this reduction in hospitalizations, and they can help keep us from returning to those high numbers again."

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