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### **Hidalgo County Judge Richard F. Cortez signs disaster declaration; orders no mass gathering of 50 people or more**

A declaration of disaster due to a local health emergency resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic is now in effect in Hidalgo County after County Judge Richard F. Cortez signed the four-page document in the company of several of Hidalgo County mayors who have committed to issue similar declarations at the municipal level.

Once Judge Cortez issued the declaration, he proceeded to issue an order prohibiting any mass gatherings of 50 or more people as well as implemented orders prohibiting price gouging for a period of seven days. He indicated that he will ask Hidalgo County Commissioners Court to extend this order for a second week at least.

“I understand that this action will cause some hardship in Hidalgo County,” Judge Cortez said after the extraordinary move in his capacity as Director of Emergency Management. “I believe strongly, based on all empirical evidence, that this short-term suffering on behalf of us all will save lives in the long run.”

Judge Cortez decided to issue the disaster declaration a day earlier after meeting with the leadership of most of the county’s 22 municipalities. A strong consensus emerged that Hidalgo County should take preventive measures after hearing from local health experts that a COVID-19 infection in Hidalgo County is now virtually inevitable.

As part of the consensus, the mayors agreed to sign local disaster declarations for their respective municipalities so that the residents and visitors of Hidalgo County have a uniform directive. As part of Tuesday’s signing ceremony, each of the mayors who are director of emergency management for their own municipalities, signed their own orders.