

March 1, 2021

The Honorable Governor Hogan
State of Maryland
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Governor Hogan,

On behalf of the restaurant industry, we remain united in our quest to advocate for restaurant survival. Your diligence in developing the MD Relief Act is appreciated and we acknowledge the challenges facing us all. It has been a month since we last wrote and nearly a year that our restaurants have demonstrated their ability to offer a safe and regulated space for people to gather. If the Maryland recovery plan is based on data, we do not understand why restaurants have and continue to be targeted. No data has pointed to restaurants as being a source of COVID spread. Why is it okay for Marylanders to support big box stores and not community restaurants? While we recognize you have noted a commitment to getting restaurants to a position of recovery, we beg you to recognize restaurants have been targeted. Please help us facilitate our ability to generate income.

As we are approaching warm weather and given the fact that MANY restaurants have NO capability for outdoor dining statewide, we request the following:

- Permit plexi-glass barriers between seating in indoor booths. They are allowed outdoors, and provide a physical barrier between adjacent patrons, are acceptable for the Maryland Legislature cubicles and schools. We suggest County / City Health Officers have the final sign off on each establishment's configuration and compliance.
- Expand the number of people permitted per table to 10 - this is especially significant in our resort communities as groups of 10 can stay together and should be allowed to dine together.
- Reopen buffet service establishments. These restaurants have been shut down for nearly one year. Other US States have permitted and successfully reopened buffets following all CDC and state health department guidelines and regulations.
- Restaurant capacity was eased to allow 75% occupancy on September 18, 2020 when the State positivity rate was at 3.21%. On November 20, capacity was reduced to 50% when the positivity rate was over 8% and climbing. As our positivity rate has now returned to 3%, capacity should once again increase to 75%. It is important to note that the 6-foot rule for able spacing continues to dictate capacity.
- As the positivity rate continues to decline and the number of COVID-19 vaccinations of Marylanders increase, additional restrictions should be lifted or reduced.

With policy being driven by science experts, the weight of economic and psychological drivers must be brought into the balance. Humans can only survive isolation for so long and restaurants allow gathering in a safe space, again much safer than house parties. Recognizing our different counties and jurisdictions all with varying risk profiles, local health officials need to understand their ability of authority and not fear ramifications. These vital partnerships and input from local leaders allow for a nuanced and gradual reopening process that considers both local needs and the COVID rates of cases per 100,000 residents, yet, local officials can only be *more* restrictive.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss these steps. We sincerely hope that these measures can be implemented in the coming weeks. The hospitality industry remains committed to offering safe dining experiences. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Restaurant Association of Maryland
Ocean City Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Association
Salisbury Area Chamber of Commerce
Allegany County Chamber of Commerce
Berlin Chamber of Commerce
Calvert County Chamber of Commerce
Charles County Chamber of Commerce
Crisfield Chamber of Commerce
Dorchester Chamber of Commerce
Frederick County Chamber of Commerce
Garrett County Chamber of Commerce
Greater Ocean City Chamber of Commerce
Greater Salisbury Committee
Howard County Chamber of Commerce
Ocean Pines Chamber of Commerce
Pocomoke City Chamber of Commerce
Queen Anne's County Chamber of Commerce
Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce
Snow Hill Chamber of Commerce
St. Mary's Chamber of Commerce
Talbot Chamber of Commerce
Washington County (Hagerstown) Chamber of Commerce

CC: Secretary of Commerce Kelly Schulz, MD Recovery Team