

November 20, 2020

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

Dear Governor Hogan,

We are writing on behalf of the hospitality industry to share our collective concerns. As you know, restaurants are an economic engine especially in rural communities. Further, restaurants are dedicated to their employees and communities by offering first jobs, career advancement opportunities and support of local charities, sports teams, and events. One of the most effective ways to reignite our economy is to get Marylanders working again and hospitality provides this route. While we understand your Roadmap to Recovery is a document and not a calendar, we urge you to recognize the current restaurant restrictions are stringent enough and the negative economic impact of further restrictions would far outweigh any benefits. Restaurateurs are resilient, have been managing customer flow and deserve the opportunity to be open during the holiday season. Frankly, these revenues are needed to ensure existence.

As Maryland moved from containment to mitigation and now to the recovery phase, your roadmap called for your team to add business, community, and labor leaders. Of the seventeen members of your team, we see only one from the hospitality sector. The travel industry has been hardest hit by the pandemic. While we appreciate Marriott having a seat on the team, we are requesting the Restaurant Association of Maryland be added. Communication and collaboration are a critical component of recovery and the restaurant industry has been left out of the direct conversation. We would also appreciate more lead time following announcements to provide sufficient time to prepare. Scheduling affects more than just the employees as their families are also impacted and management of perishable products is essential for cost reduction.

In our opinion, the foodservice industry has been unfairly targeted as contact tracing lacks concrete evidence. Why is it okay to fly, yet indoor dining is considered taboo? Maryland's own contact tracing site explanation states, "due to the nature of COVID-19 and the wide range of scenarios in which a person can become infected, most of the time it will not be possible to pinpoint exactly where and when a case became infected." Penalizing restaurants is only further destroying our economy.

We understand the need to ensure we do not surpass our public health and health care capacities. Our State is truly diverse and statewide operational mandates would prove detrimental to the Shore. We support the ability for counties to make their own decisions and hope that you would not waiver from allowing local jurisdiction decision making. Recently, we stumbled on Colorado's framework for different levels of "openness" citing five levels from least to most restrictive. Details for each level outline specific metrics and how many people can participate in various activities at one time. Their framework recognizes unique local circumstances using an intuitive dial to visualize a community's success in containing the spread of COVID-19. By increasing predictability, local communities have another tool to make life amidst the pandemic more sustainable.

Thank you for the recent Hometown Tourism grants, as well as the Direct Restaurant Relief funds. We urge the Department of Commerce to continue developing programs that will directly assist the crippled hospitality industry.

We have two final concerns: unemployment insurance and liability. Regarding unemployment insurance, we hope the reimbursement of the trust fund remains of utmost importance and we desperately need immunity from civil liability for COVID-19 related claims by customers and employees. As always, thank you for your consideration of our viewpoints.

Sincerely,

Ocean City Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Association
Greater Ocean City Chamber of Commerce
Salisbury Area Chamber of Commerce
Greater Salisbury Committee
Ocean Pines Chamber of Commerce
Berlin Chamber of Commerce
Dorchester Chamber of Commerce
Snow Hill Chamber of Commerce
Pocomoke City Chamber of Commerce
Crisfield Chamber of Commerce
Queen Anne's County Chamber of Commerce

Cc: Maryland Department of Commerce, Kelly Schulz
Maryland Department of Labor, Tiffany Robinson