

March 14, 2020

The Honorable Ned Lamont
Governor, State of Connecticut
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

To The Honorable Governor Ned Lamont:

As an industry association representing more than 8,500 businesses across the state who collectively employ more than 160,000 people, the Connecticut Restaurant Association is keenly focused on the spreading COVID-19 virus. We are writing today to thank you for your continued attention and communication about the virus, to update you on our own efforts as employers to help contain its spread, and to request that the state take action on some specific, immediate changes that will protect our businesses, our employees, and our state economy.

First, we want you to know that our association is actively working to coordinate efforts between our member restaurants and national counterparts to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Our primary focus is working with local restaurants to protect the health and safety of individual businesses, employees, and customers. For example, the CRA is providing recommendations on enhanced cleaning protocols above and beyond the rigorous cleanliness standards our businesses already follow. We are also emphasizing continued communication and adaptation as the situation changes, so that we can continue to serve our customers safely and effectively as we receive more information from government officials.

To that end, we understand that our state government is making decisions on how best to protect our state. We want to be a partner in that effort, and to also offer ideas for a new state program that could provide the Connecticut hospitality industry with relief as it weathers this difficult situation. We believe that such action will protect our employees, our customers, and our economy. This program could offer much-needed relief in various ways, such as:

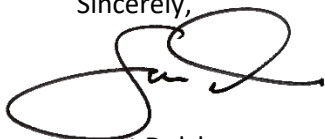
- Preventing price gouging by implementing temporary delivery fee caps. Food delivery apps will be critical for many, and we must protect consumers who will rely on these services during this crisis;
- Extending the window for restaurants to make payments on COVID-19-related costs they are incurring;
- Extending the terms of payments to alcohol distributors from 30 to 60 days;
- Enacting a 90-day extension on paying monthly sales tax;
- Making available no interest loans to those who have seen a dramatic decrease in business;
- Eliminating penalties for late payment of business and property taxes;
- Adjust the merit rating and benefit payment procedures for Unemployment Compensation;
- Extending the cure period for various violations facing businesses during the crisis;
- Additional regulatory relief for restaurants in regards to unemployment claims; and
- Educating the public about how citizens are safe to patronize their local restaurants and bars.

As you consider action on ideas such as these, please keep in mind the very unique role that restaurants play in both our economy and food service industry. In recent days, we've watched as large corporations and other businesses have made decisions about telecommuting and other ideas to keep employees home. It goes without saying that in the restaurant industry, our employees cannot work from home. Not only that, but the ripple effect of events and gatherings being cancelled is already having serious consequences for our members and their employees. As a sector that employs more than 10 percent of our state workforce, these decisions can and will impact our employees and our state economy.

We cannot overstate how many restaurants are already facing dire circumstances. Anecdotally, one of our members has already seen 47 scheduled parties cancel through the month of April, and another has already seen a reduction in sales of 45 percent. Our restaurants want to stay open and keep employees on the payroll; however, without state action many restaurants will have no choice but to suspend operations, and potentially turn what we hope is a short-term public health emergency into a much longer economic crisis for Connecticut.

We urge your assistance, and again thank you for all you are already doing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Dolch', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Scott Dolch
Executive Director
Connecticut Restaurant Association

CC: DECD Commissioner, David Lehman
Senate President Pro Tempore, Martin Looney
Senate Majority Leader, Bob Duff
Senate Minority Leader, Len Fasano
Speaker of the House, Joe Aresimowicz
House Majority Leader, Matt Ritter
House Minority Leader, Themis Klarides