

August 28, 2020

The Honorable Governor Kim Reynolds
Office of the Governor
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50319



Dear Governor Reynolds,

We are writing on behalf of Iowa's restaurant and bar industry in reference to the Governor's August 27, 2020 Proclamation which closes bars, breweries and other drinking establishments; as well as limits alcohol service hours for restaurants in six counties. As an industry we have worked hard to collaborate and cooperate with the mandates in previous proclamations including supporting enforcement steps and penalties for hospitality businesses that did not comply with required mitigation strategies. Hospitality was the only industry that has called for enforcement as the way to protect itself as we navigate together the current pandemic.

We were confident our willingness to work with the Governor's Office, Iowa ABD, and Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals exhibited how strongly we feel about the safety of our employees and patrons. We agreed that the operators in our industry unwilling to comply with mandates should face significant consequences. We did not want a few non-compliant outliers to jeopardize the livelihoods of the vast majority of operators who were not only following the mandates, but have been going above and beyond, to keep people safe.

This six county shut down impacts 273 bars, 29 Iowa breweries, 16 Iowa wineries, 4 Iowa distillers, and further limits the ability of 376 restaurants who serve alcohol as they try to survive what has already been an exceedingly difficult time.

If there are problem establishments, why weren't the regulatory tools and enforcement measures already in place deployed? Why are we once again receiving blanket closures of legal businesses, 99% of whom are complying with every rule? If contact tracing is showing that a particular bar, in a particular community, is the source of a COVID outbreak, then why isn't that business being temporarily closed rather than every drinking establishment in the county?

Effectuated drinking establishments, Iowa-based breweries, distilleries, and wineries, as well as restaurants are the life's work of their owners. These are family-based businesses who are on the brink of losing everything for what appears to be an unwillingness to apply current enforcement policies. We have seen the social media photos of college towns. But, where others see lines of young people standing in line on the street and believe bars aren't doing their part, we see lines of people not being let into our establishments because we're following social distancing rules and limiting capacities.

Our request is simple, please modify your Proclamation. Use the enforcement measures already in place and punish those who simply refuse to do the right thing. Allow the others – every type of establishment-- to reopen under the previously stated guidelines and enforcement measures. These businesses lost St. Patrick's Day and Mother's Day and now sit on the brink of losing a beautiful patio weekend over the Labor Day Holiday. They are

once again sitting on thousands of dollars of food and beverage inventories that are unrecoverable losses. Even if they are able to sell “to go” food, cocktails and other alcohol, these sales represent a fraction of the on-premise business they are being forced to give up. What’s more, because receipts-of-sales are being used to measure what is a bar (contrary to industry norms or other definitions used in code), there are restaurants that sell \$10 cocktails and \$8 small plates that will be shut down because the numbers don’t work.

It is time to value this industry at the same level we value others. We employ 155,000 Iowans. One in three find their first job in our industry. Fully half of the adults in Iowa found employment in a restaurant or bar at some point in their life. We are more than twice as likely to hire people from the re-entry population and are one of the largest employers of immigrants in the state. We are asking you take actions to SAVE OUR INDUSTRY. Many establishments in these six counties cannot survive if they remain closed until September 20th. Sadly, the 1,000 locations we expect to lose statewide by the time all COVID mitigation steps are lifted will likely increase exponentially if these shutdowns and service limitations remain in place.

Our industry is willing to talk about other options. Some have suggested a proclamation which creates a temporary increase in the drinking age for on-premise service so the problem demographic, rather than responsible businesses, are impacted. Most have asked that the enforcement measures we reluctantly agreed to be fully utilized. All ask for a Hospitality Relief Fund to help us recover the cost of wasted inventories, missed rents, and lost sales. We need assistance now. Please help us to save our businesses and preserve the role the hospitality industry plays in the culture and flavor of Iowa we bring to our communities.

We understand this is a difficult time to serve in leadership in our state and that quick decisions must be made to keep people safe—but it is time to stop laying the blame of COVID spread at the feet of the hospitality industry. Everyone of us knows someone who has tested positive for COVID. We are saddened by the loss of life, as well as the loss of our “normal.” However, we face the stark reality that the hospitality industry will never see normal again if we don’t act fast to preserve these businesses and the jobs that come with them.

Again, we ask that you work with our industry to find solutions that don’t exacerbate the problems brought on by COVID-19 closures earlier this year. Please support small local business and use the enforcement measures we worked together to put in place, in lieu of yesterday’s proclamation language.

Respectfully submitted in collaboration with the attached list of members of Iowa’s hospitality industry,



Jessica Dunker
President and CEO
Iowa Restaurant Association