



July 26, 2020

Dr. Mysheika W. Roberts
Health Commissioner
Columbus Public Health

Dear Dr. Roberts,

Thank you for the conversation on Friday about your plan to ask Columbus City Council to place restrictions on the hours of operations for bars, nightclubs and restaurants – requiring impacted businesses to close for operation at 11 p.m. each evening effective Tuesday, July 28, 2020.

The Ohio Restaurant Association (ORA), our Board of Directors and the Governor’s Restaurant Advisory Group have been working intently since March to be part of the solution to keep communities safe across Ohio, including Columbus. Nothing is more important than the health and safety of our employees and customers.

ORA Requests Information

You mentioned in our conversation that your position is data-driven and evidence-based. And Mayor Ginther stated in his July 24 news release: “We know that bars and nightclubs have been the source of outbreaks locally.” Using science and data is the correct way to make assessments and decisions, therefore we ask that you provide that data to the ORA and the public so that we may understand the basis of the city’s position.

We make this request because clear evidence of restaurants being the source of COVID cases seems non-existent anywhere in the USA. Recently, Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley said zero cases in the city have been traced back to a restaurant. "Restaurants are safe, restaurants are safe, restaurants are safe," Cranley said during a press conference.

See more: <https://local12.com/news/local/cranley-says-restaurants-are-safe-covid-19-cases-not-being-traced-to-them-cincinnati>

Our Industry is Committed to Operating Safely

- The vast majority of Ohio’s restaurants, foodservice locations and bars are following the **Dine Safe Ohio** order and doing a great job keeping employees and guests safe. We’ve heard this directly from Gov. DeWine, Lt. Gov. Husted, Ohio Public Safety, the Ohio Investigative Unit (OIU) and health departments around the state. There were some outliers, but the OIU is providing notice to violators. Cases will soon be going in front of the Ohio Liquor Commission, and we support action, where needed, to ensure compliance.
- The ORA created the **Ohio Restaurant Promise** – and members all over the state are pledging to operate safely for employees and guests. <https://www.ohiorestaurant.org/>
- The ORA launched our **Unified Industry Voice** campaign last week to spotlight information about how to operate during the COVID pandemic. We developed this with the Ohio Environmental Health Association, the Governor’s Restaurant Advisory Group and Cameron Mitchell Restaurants. This campaign includes new FAQs, flowcharts for managing COVID cases, webinars, news interviews and more. For more about the **Unified Industry Voice** campaign, click [here](#).

- Face covering requirements have only been in effect in Franklin County since July 8 and were in place statewide starting July 23. The ORA has endorsed the use of face coverings for employees since March and for guests since the Governor made his recommendation.
- Gov. DeWine and Lt. Gov. Husted asked the ORA more than three weeks ago about potential steps we would recommend if they wanted to restrict bars. We met with the Governor's Restaurant Advisory Group, and they developed five recommendations (see below). All are in place/process except limiting alcohol consumption to midnight:
 1. Continued communication
 2. Enforcement
 3. Limit hours for alcohol consumption to end at midnight
 4. Use of color-coded system should be considered when applying further restrictions
 5. Require patrons to wear masks in public areas in those counties that are RED

We Urgently Request That You and Mayor Ginther Reassess Your Request to City Council

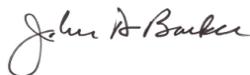
For the reasons outlined above, we are confident our industry is operating in a responsible manner and is committed to being part of the solution for controlling the transmission of COVID-19. We also ask you to reconsider on behalf of the tens of thousands of central Ohioans who work in our industry – which is essential as it represents 51% of the state's food dollar. Their livelihoods must be protected. Our industry is the second-largest employer in Ohio, with 585,000 people working in roles ranging from owners, operators, general managers, chefs, shift-supervisors, hosts, servers, food prep, customer service and support personnel.

Our most recent weekly survey of owners/operators across Ohio indicated that 82% do not expect to breakeven financially in 2020 as two-thirds are reporting sales down -20% to -70% vs. 2019. It is critical to recognize that most foodservice owners/operators' businesses are already hemorrhaging with significant losses, and that further limiting operations would be an additional devastating blow. We believe firmly it is more prudent to give the current Dine Safe Ohio order and use of face coverings more time to see if recent leveling of COVID trends continue and improve in Franklin County.

Public health can be maintained, while also fully supporting central Ohio's restaurant community – these concepts are not mutually exclusive. Our industry and our members are working tirelessly to help as many locations and jobs survive as possible to keep our state and the City of Columbus vibrant.

We look forward to further conversation.

Sincerely,



John D. Barker
President & CEO
Ohio Restaurant Association

Cc:

Andrew Ginther, Columbus Mayor

Shannon Hardin, Columbus City Council President

Sheila Trautner, Chair of the Ohio Restaurant Association and Owner of Taste Hospitality

Gary Callicoat, Vice Chair of the Ohio Restaurant Association and Founder/CEO of the Rusty Bucket Restaurant and Tavern

Tod Bowen, Managing Director of External Affairs and Government Relations, Ohio Restaurant Association