



December 8, 2020

Mayor Dr. Robert Garcia
Members of City Council
Long Beach City
411 W Ocean Blvd
Long Beach, CA 90802

Subject: Agenda Item #30 Study Session on COVID-19 and Health Orders

Dear Mayor Garcia and Councilmembers,

I write to you on behalf of the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, our 678 members, representatives, and community partners regarding the study session on the COVID-19 pandemic and the most recent health order. As of March, our business community has dutifully adapted to local and state mandates for business operations. Industries have made massive investments to protect the health and safety of employees as well as patrons and customers. As you conduct the study on COVID-19 and the data presented, we ask you to consider the implications of the health order.

The Chamber and the local business community understand that the COVID-19 pandemic remains uncharted territory. We firmly believe that our leaders must make decisions that are educated by strong evidence with comprehensive analysis. We appreciate the City's leadership and dedication to our safety during this unprecedented time and value research and data presented by the local, county, and state health officials. We do not dispute the number of cases or the severity of this pandemic however, we feel that the recent health orders do not account for the tremendous investment Long Beach businesses have made to create a safe environment as required by the orders. Many businesses have amended operations, and some businesses and industries have gone above and beyond. The pandemic has exposed the financial fragility of small businesses and the severe restrictions of the current orders leave our smallest businesses with more questions than answers and with a feeling of inequity in the determination of what is deemed "essential."

While we understand the need to limit the capacity of retail, this modification shows that there is room for flexibility in the health orders across all industries. If retail's capacity can be reduced, the same can be done in other industries. It is troubling to hear of our leaders speaking of an economic recovery when businesses are closing due to the severe restrictions of the current health order without much in the way of financial assistance. We believe an economic recovery can only start when current businesses are made financially whole under the current restrictions that do not allow them to operate – this is not an either-or scenario but a mutually exclusive scenario.

Our businesses have had to adapt to every health order since March and procured necessary items to stop the spread of COVID-19. Restaurants have either created or expanded outdoor dining, personal care establishments have limited appointments and capacity; small business retail has had to invest in technology and has also had to limit capacity – the list goes on and on. These businesses have adapted despite decreased earnings and limited staff all the while adhering to the new health orders only to find it was not enough. We continue to believe if modifications can be made to accommodate various industries, then this must be applied across all sectors.

Tonight, we urge the City Council to push for transparent data that shows a definitive link between the rising cases of COVID-19 and the industries that have been forced to close for the duration of the regional stay at home order. Transparent data would increase the confidence in the stay-at-home order as well as dispel any notion of inequity. We know a much larger statewide order is currently in play and we must adjust accordingly. It is our hope when the statewide health order is lifted, our local order will allow all industries an equitable chance at saving their business with assure of financial assistance to assist in the recovery.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeremy Harris".

Jeremy Harris
President/CEO
Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce