

The Honorable Roy Cooper
Governor of North Carolina
20301 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699

April 30, 2020

Dear Governor Cooper,

We know that COVID-19 is both an unprecedented public health and economic crisis for our country, our state, and our communities, and we appreciate the leadership that you have shown in navigating North Carolina through this emergency. Much of our state's economy has been shut down by the pandemic and subsequent executive orders, and North Carolina businesses and the people who work in them are hurting.

North Carolina's restaurants are in trouble. They have been the most devastated of any industry, with the current prohibitions on dine-in service leading to more than 300,000 restaurant employees being laid off or furloughed and nearly 70% of all restaurant locations closed or operating at very limited capacity. With each passing day, the outlook becomes more dire for these businesses to survive.

In a recent survey of NCRLA member restaurants:

- 77% said their sales were down 70% or more
- Only 35% of those who applied for the PPP federal relief program received loans. The majority — 65% who applied did not receive loans
- 65% of those surveyed said their business wouldn't re-open if it remained closed for 2 months or more
- Only 35% of restaurants surveyed said they could survive a business closure of more than 2 months

North Carolina restaurants, working closely and in partnership with the NC Department of Health and Human Services and local health inspectors who regulate our industry, have always operated with an intense focus on safety — food safety, employee safety, and guest safety. NC restaurants are currently offering carryout, drive-thru, and delivery, helping meet NC food needs and offering a glimmer of relief and normalcy to our customers. As businesses across our state begin to reopen, restaurants are able to safely offer patio and dine-in service, with appropriate social distancing and other procedures we will follow to keep our employees and our guests safe.

NCRLA has been working diligently with public health experts and restaurants of all sizes to develop standards that can be adopted across the state to allow for a safe and thoughtful reopening. This collaborative effort, led by more than sixty restaurateurs from across the state

and representing every sector of the foodservice industry, culminated with the "[North Carolina Restaurant Promise](#)" — a list of public health commitments reflecting CDC guidance that NCRLA is asking restaurants and their customers to make to each other. As you and other leaders continue to emphasize, safely reopening depends on a partnership between businesses and their customers. North Carolina restaurants are experts in safety, sanitation, and customer satisfaction, and we know that these values will continue to drive their decision making.

Therefore, the North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association encourages you to strongly consider allowing restaurants to begin to offer socially-distanced patio and dine-in service as soon as possible. Every week that goes by will claim another percentage of restaurants that will never reopen, jobs that will disappear permanently, and communities that will be left without their local restaurants — businesses that are so often the cornerstones of their downtowns and neighborhoods and fuel so much economic development. The federal relief offered in the CARES Act largely misses the mark for restaurants that are closed or operating at deeply diminished capacity.

Reopening restaurants in mid-May for patio and dine-in service could be the difference between survival and permanent closure for many restaurants. North Carolina restaurants pledge to do everything in our power to operate with a heightened focus on health, hygiene, sanitization and safety — for our employees, our guests, and our communities. We have already worked with our regulators, the local health sanitarians who regularly inspect restaurants, to produce recommended guidelines for reopening restaurants in North Carolina, and the National Restaurant Association, with an expert panel, produced "[Reopening Guidance: A Guide for the Restaurant Industry](#)".

Above all, NCRLA is committed to a sustained recovery, and so we will continue to work closely with our members, policymakers, customers, and allied partners to ensure that the re-opening of patio and dine-in service is as safe and successful as possible. We look forward to the day when restaurants can again be the cornerstones of our communities, providing essential jobs while helping revive North Carolina's economic engine so our state can continue to offer the essential services necessary to so many. Together we can get through this crisis and emerge stronger on the other side.

In closing, we urge you to allow restaurants to begin to offer social distanced patio and dine-in service as soon as possible. We are inspected, regulated, and trained — and we, along with the 550,000 members of our NC hospitality community, are ready to get back to work.

Sincerely,



Lynn Mingos
President & CEO