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2020

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October 15, 2020

Flathead City-County Health Board
1035 1st Avenue West
Kalispell, Montana 59901

Re: Proposed tightened restrictions on crowd sizes due to rising COVID-19 cases

Ladies and Gentlemen:


The Kalispell Chamber appreciates the work of the Flathead City-County Health Board to curb the quickly rising cases of COVID-19 recorded in Flathead County since March, and especially in the last two weeks. We believe it is the responsibility of every citizen to follow state and county guidelines to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Nevertheless, we encourage you to reconsider your proposed regulations which would tighten crowd sizes in bars and restaurants to a maximum of 25 people and reduce the capacity in these establishments to 25% of capacity, for these reasons:

- There are also costs and consequences to our community for overlaying regulations which create furloughs and unemployment and the closure of bars and restaurants. The vast majority of these establishments are doing a good job with safe practices around COVID-19.
- The October 13th newspaper report on this topic cited outbreaks from what sound like private events: weddings, political events, and trade shows. Let's not penalize bars and restaurants for events in which they are not involved.
- There are far fewer resources available to businesses and the unemployed now than when the original restrictions were implemented in March. The Payroll Protection Plan has expired, unemployment benefits are less, negotiations on the Phase 4 relief package have broken off with little hope of any relief before the election.
- Today's Missoulian cites a state report on transmission research. The article reports that the greatest risk from congregate activity is occurring from "schools, assisted living facilities, and long-term care facilities but outbreaks in other settings, such as correctional facilities, group homes and mental health facilities have also been reported". Restaurants and bars are not referenced in the article as congregate settings to have caused clusters of new cases.

Medical professionals agree that we have entered a phase where we are experiencing community spread of the coronavirus. It is everyone's responsibility to follow public health guidelines so that children can attend school, businesses can stay open, and employees can earn a living. Let's not unfairly single out certain industry sectors and their employees for what is a community-wide healthcare challenge. We urge you table these proposed regulations.

Sincerely,


Joe Unterreiner
President and CEO