

October 28, 2020

Honorable J.B. Pritzker Governor,
State of Illinois
100 W. Randolph St., Suite 16-100
Chicago, IL 60601

Office of the Governor
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Governor Pritzker,

I have always appreciated the good working relationship between the Village of Morton Grove and the Governor's office. I respect the difficult decisions you have had to make during these unprecedented times. However, I stand with our local restaurants and bars and the thousands of residents who depend on this industry to support their families. Let me be blunt. Your recent order to close indoor service in bars and restaurants is an unnecessary, heavy-handed deathblow to these businesses and must be reconsidered.

Last March, when restaurants and bars were closed thousands lost their jobs, business owners were unable to make rent and mortgage payments, and their hard-earned savings were wiped out. As we gained more understanding about COVID, some, not all businesses began to see some relief, first with outdoor service and later with limited indoor dining, all while following common sense social distancing and face protection requirements. Serious COVID cases remained relatively flat for the next four months until October when we began to see an increase in the numbers of persons testing positive for COVID. If this increase was caused by restaurants and bars, we would have seen these numbers go up much earlier. Hospitalization rates are also increasing, but this is to be expected as we approach colder weather and our annual "flu season". Available data still shows that more than 75% of people hospitalized with COVID come from assisted living facilities, while less than 2% are restaurant workers. Data can be interpreted in different ways based on the number and the demographics of those being tested. We should not bankrupt our small businesses, destroy our local economy and ruin the state's food and beverage service industry based on statistics that can be skewed and misinterpreted.

I do not understand why casinos, shopping centers, big box stores, and most significantly our schools are still allowed to operate, but our restaurants can't serve customers indoors. If it is safe for our precious children and our invaluable teachers to be in their classrooms, why can't we find a way for restaurants to stay open?

The majority of our country is smarter today about COVID-19 than they were seven months ago. With their employees' health and safety and patrons at the forefront of everything they do, restaurant owners now know how to operate during a pandemic. The fortunate restaurants that were able to survive the first shutdown have invested thousands of dollars into restaurant modifications like adding partitions, installing new HVAC systems, hiring cleaning companies, and buying new cleaning supplies. They have also invested in new training for their employees so that they and their patrons can be as safe as possible.

I will continue to urge all Morton Grove residents and businesses to practice common sense solutions to slow the spread of the pandemic, but I cannot in good conscience order the Morton Grove Police Department to enforce your Order. We have been advised that the Village could be sued if we try to enforce this Order. Similar orders have been overturned in the courts, and Illinois law gives the state, not local governments the authority to close a business for violating a Governor's Executive Order. The most our Village could do is impose a monetary fine on the business and that's not acceptable given the financial hardships these businesses are already facing.

In Morton Grove, we pride ourselves on being "Incredibly Close and Amazingly Open". We care about each other; we discuss our differences; and we work together to find solutions. Governor, my restaurants deserve a fighting chance to make it to 2021. My residents need their jobs, the Morton Grove economy needs our local businesses to stay open, and my residents deserve the freedom to choose whether they feel comfortable dining out. Please suspend your order while we work together to help our businesses and keep our community safe.

Sincerely,



Daniel P. DiMaria
Village President