

December 1, 2020

*The Honorable Ned Lamont
Governor, State of Connecticut
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106*

*The Honorable Len Fasano
Senate Minority Leader
Legislative Office Building, Room 3402
Hartford, CT 06106*

*The Honorable Martin Looney
Senate President Pro Tempore
Legislative Office Building, Room 3300
Hartford, CT 06106*

*The Honorable Joe Aresimowicz
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Legislative Office Building, Room 4105
Hartford, CT 06106*

*The Honorable Themis Klarides
House Minority Leader
Legislative Office Building, Room 4200
Hartford, CT 06106*

*The Honorable Bob Duff
Senate Majority Leader
Legislative Office Building, Room 3300
Hartford, CT 06106*

*The Honorable Matt Ritter
House Majority Leader
Legislative Office Building, Room 4106
Hartford, CT 06106*

To the Honorable Governor Lamont and Leaders of the General Assembly:

As you know, few sectors of Connecticut's economy have been hit harder by the COVID pandemic than our local restaurant industry. Before this year, we had more than 8,500 eating and drinking establishments across our state, collectively employing more than 160,000 people. Unfortunately, more than 600 restaurants, caterers and private event venues have already closed over the past eight months, and without additional support many more are likely to shutter in the weeks and months ahead. These are predominantly small businesses, often family run, who are employing local Connecticut residents in every corner of our state.

To that end, there are three specific areas where we need your partnership to help CT restaurants survive the crucial weeks and months ahead. To be clear, *our industry is on the verge of collapse*. Without your commitment and real support, thousands of restaurants across Connecticut will be forced to close -- and the vast majority of them will never reopen.

- 1. Allow Indoor Dining to Continue.** Indoor dining began on June 17, meaning that for more than four months the state allowed indoor dining while keeping COVID positivity rates at or below 1 percent. That was possible in part because our restaurants worked extremely hard and invested in a lot of PPE in order to provide a safe environment for both their employees and customers over these past eight months. Connecticut has now proven that it's absolutely possible for restaurants to operate safely with indoor service -- we ask you to continue to keep our doors open, so that our businesses can survive.
- 2. Create a New Restaurant Grant Program.** In March, the CARES Act stimulus bill was passed by Congress and signed into law, sending nearly \$1.4 billion dollars to Connecticut, hundreds of millions of which remains unallocated. The creation of a new grant program, similar to programs launched in the District of Columbia, New Jersey, Maryland, Rhode Island and Ohio would send a lifeline to thousands of local businesses struggling to remain open right now. Even if CARES Act Funds might not be an option, we know the administration has brought up the Rainy Day Funding as a potential option to help these small businesses. The "Connecticut CARES" program, while very well intentioned, simply pales in comparison to what others states are doing -- Connecticut must do more if we want to save our restaurants.

3. Help Bolster Consumer Confidence. As we said above, Connecticut restaurants have proven they can operate safely. However, the dining public is not always made aware of the important distinctions between states that were allowing bars and restaurants to operate *without any restrictions*, and places like Connecticut where restaurants are being regulated during the pandemic. We greatly appreciate that Gov. Lamont and others have said that the vast majority of restaurants are operating safely. We need all of you to work with us to help communicate the great efforts restaurants are making to stay safe, and to remind the public – and one another – that local restaurants are predominantly small businesses owned by and employing local community members.

As we have said consistently, Connecticut has been a national leader in combating the COVID-19 crisis, and we commend your work as state leaders to understand that our state can prioritize public health without losing sight of its economic future. We can continue to be leaders by focusing on the areas outlined above together and work to **#SaveCTRestaurants**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Dolch', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Scott Dolch
Executive Director
Connecticut Restaurant Association