



August 20, 2020

The Honorable Gretchen Whitmer
State of Michigan
PO Box 30013
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Governor Whitmer,

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented global health crisis. Our business community has supported actions to flatten the curve as protecting the health of our fellow citizens is our shared responsibility.

With your leadership, we have flattened the curve and Michigan has been able to safely reopen many sectors of our economy. Thank you. As the State weighs next steps, we collectively urge more be done to position Michigan for a successful economic recovery.

We believe that if industries like restaurants, public swimming pools, casinos and others can find a way to safely open in some capacity, we can also find a way to safely open gyms, theaters, bowling alleys and other industries.

Michigan is one of a handful of states that has not allowed these sectors to open in any capacity. These businesses have been completely closed after months of the public health emergency, while still facing property tax bills, rent, payroll and other expenses. This has placed businesses in extreme hardship, resulting in permanent closures and layoffs. As an example, more than 1,000 layoffs were recently announced by the YMCA in Grand Rapids.

Our members of these industries would be happy to meet with you and your team to work through your concerns and discuss how they can reopen safely based on science and the latest research. We recognize and acknowledge that some businesses may have infrastructure and environments to support the needed social distancing to open safely, while others in the same industry may not.

In addition to calling for the safe and appropriate reopening of these sectors, we hope you and your Administration will work with stakeholders to find a solution to the issue of property tax deferral for these severely impacted industries.

Property taxes are often the largest bill a business receives. This is a threat to the long-term viability of many businesses, and they should not be forced to bear the additional burden of interest, penalties and fees on property taxes they cannot pay due to their closure.

Finally, we urge you to work with Legislature to pass legislation assuring that employers in all sectors who take reasonable steps to follow public health guidelines will be protected against needless COVID-19 related lawsuits.

We ask that you and your Administration find ways to give businesses, especially those that remain closed, a fighting chance – and soon.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to continuing to be your partners in creating a safe and prosperous Michigan.

Sincerely,



Brian Calley
President
Small Business Association of Michigan



Rich Studley
President & CEO
Michigan Chamber of Commerce



Rick Baker
President & CEO
Grand Rapids Chamber



Sandy Baruah
President & CEO
Detroit Regional Chamber

cc: Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey
Senate Minority Leadership Jim Ananich
House Speaker Lee Chatfield
House Minority Leader Christine Greig