



NEW JERSEY SENATE

SENATE CHAMBERS

P.O. Box 099

TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08625-0099

May 27, 2020

The Honorable Philip D. Murphy
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy,

As the threat of COVID-19 continues to recede quickly for the general public, it is imperative that we make smart and fair decisions to end the hardships that continue to impact many New Jerseyans. We are concerned that many of the broad restrictions that remain on various activities and business operations as a result of the executive orders you issued at the start of the COVID-19 crisis seem to make little sense today.

We have heard repeatedly from our constituents that the manner in which reopenings have been announced appears to be arbitrary and inconsistent, with no clear communication regarding the metrics or benchmarks that must be met for executive orders to be loosened or lifted.

Other states, including New York, Pennsylvania, and Florida, have issued guidance that pegs data against clear benchmarks to demonstrate that public health interests are served by their state's policies related to the coronavirus. The people of New Jersey deserve no less.

We urge you to offer clarity about the milestones that must be reached for small shops you have deemed "non-essential" to reopen their doors to customers, for restaurants to serve diners, and for congregations to meet again in houses of worship. Many of those places are ready today to operate safely through the same precautionary measures that we trust to protect us when we visit a supermarket or other "essential retail" business.

In the absence of specific benchmarks for reopening from your administration, we urge you to review the many thoughtful reopening plans that have been submitted to you by counties, trade groups, and chambers of commerce. If those plans meet CDC guidelines, you should authorize them to be enacted immediately.

We are confident that businesses and non-profits across New Jersey are ready to reopen safely. Still, they will need your help. Without immediate action from your administration to advance or approve their reopening plans, many will not survive, and what should have been short temporary closures will become permanent.

We are especially concerned that very little has been done to support the thousands of small businesses on Main Streets across New Jersey. We have heard from thousands of employers that they will need direct financial support to remain viable after suffering steep losses resulting from the extended shutdown. At this point in time, only 4% of the billions in federal CARES Act stimulus funding received by New Jersey has been dedicated for this purpose. We implore you to increase this allocation.

Additionally, some cities, municipalities, and counties have expressed interest in pursuing innovative solutions to help reboot their downtowns and support small businesses that have been overlooked, including expanded outdoor dining and shopping and appointment based retail in venues that are currently closed to the public.

In some instances, towns will need to know that the Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control will be flexible in how liquor licenses may be utilized. In other instances, they may look to close roadways temporarily to create pedestrian safe walkways, allowing additional retail and dining establishments to move outside to operate safely. This may require approval from the Department of Transportation. Given the unprecedented circumstances, we encourage you to direct your departments to be as flexible as possible in the considerations of these requests.

Finally, we urge you to level the playing field by eliminating the arbitrary limitation of gatherings to 10 people in certain indoor locations. We note that limit does not apply to "essential retail" locations that have been permitted to operate safely at half capacity, which may be hundreds of people. If social distancing and other reasonable precautions can be maintained at any location, the 10-person limitation should be lifted. That includes at our indispensable churches, temples, mosques, and synagogues, which are as important now as ever. Risk is mitigated in each of those places by the precautionary measures that the facilities and their visitors take, not by a government designation as "essential."

New Jerseyans have gained significant knowledge about COVID-19 and how to stay safe since your executive orders were put into effect more than two months ago. They understand that some people face greater risk, and some locations, like nursing homes, must maintain and increase vigilance.

Given the benefit of time and what we have learned, we believe it makes sense to let New Jerseyans resume their lives without the continuation of arbitrary restrictions that do little today to keep them safe. If you believe public health data does not warrant that level of freedom, we encourage you to clearly explain why and to tell us, specifically, what must change. The people of New Jersey deserve to know.

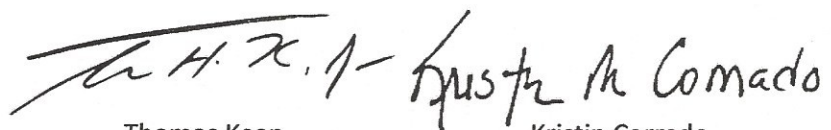
Sincerely,



Joe Pennacchio
Whip



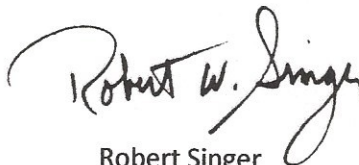
Thomas Kean
Leader



Kristin Corrado
Conference Leader



Kip Bateman
Deputy Whip



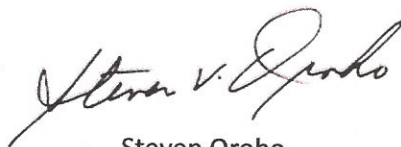
Robert Singer
Deputy Leader



Chris Brown
Deputy Conference Leader



Anthony M. Bucco
Senator – District 25



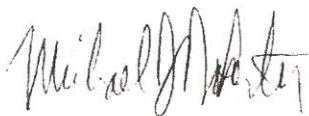
Steven Oroho
Budget Officer



Gerald Cardinale
Senator – District 39



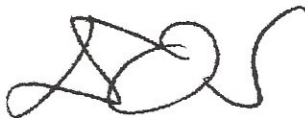
Christopher Connors
Senator – District 9



Michael Doherty
Senator – District 23




James Holzapfel
Senator – District 10



Declan O'Scanlon
Senator – District 13



Michael Testa
Senator – District 1



Samuel Thompson
Senator – District 12