Dear Sonoma County Board of Supervisors and Public Health Officer Dr. Mase:

We are heartened to hear of a revised approach to retool the virus strategy. There is no question the COVID-19 crisis has impacted everyone in some way. While great efforts have been made towards mitigating the spread of the virus, as an industry, we have felt removed from being part of the solution – a place that is frustrating and not in the best interest of Sonoma County.

Pre-pandemic, the hospitality and tourism sector in Sonoma County accounted for one in every ten jobs and more than $2.2 billion in annual economic impact. The widespread shutdowns and restrictions, although necessary to protect lives, has unquestionably impacted this industry more than any other in the County with the worst impacts likely still to come.

The County has seen the permanent closure of at least 32 hospitality businesses since the pandemic began. In a survey distributed by Sonoma County Tourism, we see more than 75% of our businesses are on the precipice of closing.  In response to the question, *“****If Sonoma County does not see reduced COVID transmission rates and a loosening of restrictions, or additional economic stimulus aid, my business cannot survive beyond”:***

*0 – 1 Month: 9.2%*

*2 – 3 Months: 26%*

*3 – 6 Months: 22.1%*

*6 – 12 Months: 1.3%*

*My business is economically stable for the foreseeable future: 24.4%*

Before we lose more businesses, we implore the County of Sonoma to come up with a concrete plan towards reopening and present our community with clear answers as to why we are lagging behind and what is being done to move us forward.

Small businesses are the lifeblood of Sonoma County.  Multi-generational winemakers, craft brewers, artists and world-class restaurants create the brand DNA that not only separates Sonoma County from its competitors, but creates a singular visitor experience coveted by travelers from around the globe.

If, in fact, the County and our Health Department including Dr. Mase, is open to working with businesses to help move us closer to reopening, the organizations in the signatory line are ready to help.  This is the best way to maximize the enormous collective power that happens when Sonoma Countians have a plan and work together to achieve goals.  The fact that Sonoma County cannot get out of the Purple Tier is unacceptable.  Maximizing the incredibly smart, progressive, committed group of business professionals and residents can accomplish almost anything when given a clear plan of action.

Hospitality businesses in Sonoma County have been proactive at making sure they are providing, and adhering to, protocols. They have participated in the Economic Development Board’s development of Best Management Plans, have committed to asking visitors to travel safely by following our Safe Travels Promise, and have spent time and money adjusting their business model to address evolving regulations thrown their way. As you know, wineries have advocated for reopening tasting rooms for months, integrating a variety of safety protocols. Restaurants have worked hard to implement a host of safety measures and hotels have spent significant funds on integrating health and safety equipment and programs. We all want our employees, residents and visitors to be safe.  We can make that happen.

Traditionally, summer and fall represent the height of the tourist season. This is when our small businesses generate the revenue necessary to survive the slower winter months. This will not be the case in 2020.  Without question, the recent fires have exacerbated the situation. Restaurants and wineries have had to face the choice of temporarily closing due to air quality or ask their staff to work in unhealthy air conditions. This is a choice no business owner should have to make.

As we always have been, we stand ready and willing to help, but need your leadership to propel us forward before the next job is lost or the next business closes. We are not asking for a reckless track to reopening, quite the opposite.  We welcome the chance to meet with you to craft an action plan that creates broad community support and the needed measures to move Sonoma County along to reopening.

Thank you,

Sonoma County Tourism Board of Directors

in partnership with the Sonoma County Hospitality Association

And, in collaboration with:

Bodega Bay Area Chamber of Commerce

Cloverdale Chamber of Commerce

Cotati Chamber of Commerce

Geyserville Chamber of Commerce

Healdsburg Chamber of Commerce / Healdsburg Tourism Improvement District

Mark West Area Chamber of Commerce

Petaluma Area Chamber of Commerce

Petaluma Downtown Association

Petaluma Visitors Program

Rohnert Park Chamber of Commerce

Russian River Chamber and Visitor Centers

Santa Rosa Metro Chamber / Visit Santa Rosa

Sebastopol Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center

Sonoma Valley Visitors Bureau

Windsor Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center