

Small business owners and hospitality professionals share a deep commitment to our community. We care about the safety of our families, friends, and neighbors. As the pandemic spread to our communities, we immediately shuttered or adjusted our operations to protect the general health and well-being of the public. We understand the severity of the crisis and have been committed to doing our part. However, it comes with an enormous cost.

The coronavirus pandemic will devastate our already-fragile Vermont restaurant industry, especially if we don't get some relief now. Very few restaurants are able to shift operations to a take-out and delivery format especially when that holds an uncertain future. Many establishments, particularly full-service and rural operations, are anticipating declines in revenues of as much as 80% to 100%.

Thousands of Vermonters in the hospitality industry have already been laid off as a result of mandated closures and revenue loss in our industry. In addition, the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the duration of the pandemic puts us in a position where we may not be able to provide a rehire date. Businesses need assistance now to hopefully reopen and retain the jobs they worked so hard to create. Without immediate action at the State and Federal level, the reality is that many of Vermont's beloved food and beverage establishments may never recover.

We're also deeply concerned about the immediate effects this will have on our local economy. Vermont's hospitality industry is vital to the survival of our local farms, craft beverage and cheese makers just to name a few. Our businesses rely on the goods and services of other Vermont small businesses, who will undoubtedly feel the aftershock of our closures. We are striving to remain viable so that when the pandemic recedes, we can once again be gathering places for the Vermont community, providers of jobs and benefits for thousands of Vermonters, and a key part of our state's tourism economy.

**We require immediate action on the following:**

- February and March Rooms and Meals Tax Abatement so funds can be used now to support continued business operations, including help covering fixed costs, utilities, property taxes, rent/mortgage, and the losses we've already incurred on perishable inventory.
- Immediate unemployment benefits for the hospitality industry.
- Financial assistance for rent/mortgage/utility, and protection from eviction for hospitality employees.
- UI Business Rating Freeze to ensure our capacity to viably re-open operations and rebuild in the future.
- Furlough of income tax penalties and fees for a period of no less than 90 days.

**Financial support for our businesses:**

- Payroll Tax Relief.

- Establish a credit and debt committee to approach institutional lenders to discuss options for businesses under duress and advocacy for low-interest loans.
- Force Majeure Rent Relief from Landlords, mortgage payment relief, and re-evaluation of property tax if property use has been disrupted.
- Require insurance companies to consider the pandemic acceptable cause for business interruption insurance for small and medium businesses. Several states have bills in the legislature already.

**State Administrative Support:**

- Create a Task Force with key members of the government, including the Governor's Office, Local Mayors, Department of Labor and the Vermont Commerce Agency, the Legislature and Industry Stakeholders to address the restaurant industry's unique needs and challenges during the recovery.
- Establish administrative functions to specifically track impact data including but not limited to closures, lay-offs, and revenue loss.

We understand that this is a complex crisis and there are a myriad of requests for support and resources. However, without swift action by our State government and specific advocacy for our industry at the Federal level, we will not recover from this. The Vermont restaurant industry is part of the cultural fabric of our communities. We stand ready to work with our leaders, and we ask that they stand with those of us who serve Vermont through hospitality and food services.