



September 16, 2020

The Honorable Lori Lightfoot
Mayor
City of Chicago
121 N. LaSalle
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear Mayor Lightfoot:

On behalf of the Illinois Restaurant Association (IRA) and the undersigned members of Chicago's restaurant and hospitality community, we would like to thank you for your pragmatic leadership throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As you know, Chicago's dynamic dining scene is an integral part of our economy and our identity as a city. **We are reaching out to respectfully request that your administration expand the City's Phase IV: Gradually Resume Reopening Guidelines to allow for 50% indoor dining capacity at restaurants and venues.** Without increased indoor occupancy, our industry faces the inevitable closures of thousands of restaurants that are the cornerstones of Chicago's 77 communities.

The National Restaurant Association estimates \$240 billion in lost sales across the country by the end of 2020. Pre-pandemic, the foodservice industry was the largest private sector employer in the state of Illinois. The hospitality industry is an economic engine for the city and state. The loss of much-needed tax dollars, and the devastation closures have on the stability of our neighborhoods, cannot be minimized. Chicago's 7,200+ restaurants have been decimated by COVID-19. 55% of Illinois restaurant operators say it is unlikely their restaurant will still be in business six months from now. Overall, 63% of operators do not expect their staffing levels to return to pre-COVID-19 levels within the next six months. The jobs of 171,000 people who work in Chicago's diverse restaurant community are at stake. Our employees want and need a place to work.

Increasing indoor occupancy is necessary for the survival of Chicago's restaurant community in the upcoming winter months. During "normal" times, 95 to 97 cents out of every dollar a restaurant brings in is spent on employees' wages, food and general operations. Profit margins, on average, are 3-5%. Outdoor dining has been a helpful complement to indoor operations but it does not work for all operators and it will not sustain the industry through the fall and winter months. **Increasing capacity won't make us profitable but it will allow us to save jobs.**

Public health and safety is the number one priority for restaurants. Restaurants recognize the absolute need for social distancing, face coverings, PPE, and proper sanitizing. We are a highly-regulated, frequently inspected industry. Keeping people safe is what we do every day. Expanding occupancy to 50% as soon as possible is our only chance to survive this crisis. We stand ready to do whatever is necessary to provide our guests with the safest indoor dining experience in the nation.

Sincerely,

Sam Toia
President & CEO
Illinois Restaurant Association

Greg Schulson
2020 Chairman, Illinois Restaurant Association
President & CEO, Lunan Corporation/Burrito Beach