



September 28, 2020

The Honorable Greg Fischer  
President  
United States Conference of Mayors  
1620 I Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Mayor Fischer:

Six months ago restaurants were shutdown due to the on-going pandemic, and as we enter the fall, the restaurant industry remains in a perilous situation. According to newly released National Restaurant Association data, approximately 100,000 restaurants remain closed and operators report that business conditions deteriorated further in August. Compounding a major drop in sales, operating costs continue to rise as restaurants purchase safety equipment and reconfigure their operations to promote employee and customer safety as well as compliance with COVID-19 health regulations. Without significant government assistance, the restaurant industry will continue to see closures and job losses.

Restaurants appreciate the quick action of local leaders earlier this year to create additional outdoor dining opportunities. Nearly three quarters of fullservice operators currently utilize outdoor dining and report that it constitutes 44% of their overall revenue. As restaurants faced restrictions on capacity for indoor dining, these actions enabled more customers to dine at their favorite restaurants, provided much needed revenue for operators, and allowed restaurants to bring back additional staff. Expanded outdoor dining has created an essential lifeline for many operators by safely expanding seating footprints.

Colder weather creates challenges for outdoor dining. On average across the country, restaurants anticipate utilizing outdoor dining for another two months. While 49% of fullservice operators plan on taking actions to extend their outdoor dining seasons this year, these actions will be expensive for cash strapped operators. Tents, outdoor heaters, umbrellas, and other creative options can cost thousands (or tens of thousands) of dollar.<sup>1</sup>

Political leaders at the local level are uniquely positioned to help restaurants expand outdoor dining for as long as possible. Local leaders should consider:

- Continuing to encourage expanded outdoor dining areas by streamlining the permit process and by enabling restaurants to take over public spaces such as sidewalks and roads.
- Incentivizing efforts to prolong the outdoor dining season with tax credits or funding for the purchase of equipment. Some examples include District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser recently announcing \$4 million in grants for businesses to help with outdoor dining

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<sup>1</sup> For further reading about how operators are innovating with outdoor dining, please visit: <https://www.restaurant.org/articles/news/what-to-do-when-its-too-cold-to-dine-outside>.

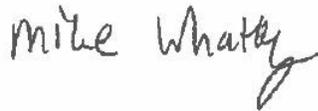
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costs, and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot holding a contest encouraging innovative ideas for outdoor dining.

- Promoting dining in restaurants and highlighting efforts to extend the outdoor dining season.

While not a substitute for the resumption of full capacity indoor dining, actions that local leaders take to extend the outdoor dining season will help restaurants of all sizes in the community. The restaurant industry continues to stay committed to working with lawmakers to ensure the health and safety of our employees, customers, and communities. Thank you for your consideration of these policy proposals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Whatley". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Mike Whatley  
Vice President, State and Local Affairs