

May 28, 2020

The Honorable Tim Walz  
Governor of Minnesota  
130 State Capitol  
75 Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Governor Walz:

On behalf of Greater Mankato Growth, the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Organization serving nearly 1,000 members in the Greater Mankato area, I write to thank you and your administration for your efforts to initiate a safe reopening of Minnesota's economy. Our community appreciates that reopening safely will require that we all undertake measures to reduce further transmission of COVID-19 and we all stand ready to do our part. However, many of our businesses have not been given the chance to open, and thus the burden of COVID-19 has not fallen fairly on all businesses. On their behalf, Greater Mankato Growth respectfully asks that you allow all businesses the opportunity to reopen in a way that is safe, sustainable, and equitable with their peers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on our business community – particularly our small, locally owned businesses that our community has spent many years intentionally cultivating. Greater Mankato Growth appreciates that many of our businesses can be open today. As you rightfully articulated, just because a business is open does not mean that customers will return. That's why our organization has been working extensively with our businesses to ensure they have access to the information and resources they need to adopt quality health and safety protocols for their workers and customers. In addition, our organization will be launching a comprehensive campaign to educate the public about the lengths our businesses are going to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and keep customers safe in order to restore consumer confidence and prompt patronage of our businesses.

We are, however, very concerned that executive orders continue to close certain classifications of businesses such as gyms and entertainment venues, and in the case of restaurants and bars, restrict them to only outside seating. These broad and inflexible classifications create disparate impact on businesses and do not recognize circumstances unique to a particular business. For instance, many gyms in Greater Mankato operate as appointment-based businesses with very small amounts of customers in a controlled environment, yet are grouped in the same category as larger fitness centers. Similarly, many restaurants in our community do not have access to an outdoor patio at all and a cap of 50 individuals does not reflect that some are able to easily accommodate more on their patio while being compliant with social distancing. We also have non-profit community venues that have the ability to operate with capacity and social distancing measures.

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Greater Mankato Growth asks that you allow all businesses to open to customers inside their establishments with reasonably appropriate restrictions that have been granted to their peers, or similarly situated businesses. We are confident in their ability to do the right thing and are working with them each and every day to employ best practices. Our business owners and customers are well-positioned to make the best choice for their business and family on whether to open and whether to patronize a business.

Without the opportunity to open very soon, we will lose many of these businesses forever. We have already permanently lost businesses, and we desperately do not want to lose more. Beyond the blow to those employees and employers losing their livelihood, the ripple effects will be felt in our community through a long-term impact to community economic growth. One of the key components of Greater Mankato's economic success and vitality has been our ability to offer a strong set of community amenities for a comparatively small metro. If we lose these businesses, the impact will be deeply felt as we do not have the customer base necessary to rebound as quickly as larger metros. You have indicated previously a willingness to consider a tailored approach based on regional conditions. That approach is warranted for Greater Minnesota.

Finally, as a significant center of education in the state, I wanted to express a particular concern we're hearing from our higher education partners regarding their inability to offer courses that require significant hands-on work that cannot be delivered in a virtual setting. We hope that you will provide guidance soon on how our colleges and other education institutions can restart those critical programs – as that type of training is in high-demand not only in our community, but across the state.

We appreciate your leadership as we navigate these difficult times. Greater Mankato Growth trusts our business community to do the right thing and stands ready to work with all businesses to open in a manner that is consistent and equitable with their peers. Please don't hesitate to contact me at [jbeyer@greatermankato.com](mailto:jbeyer@greatermankato.com) or 507-385-6645 if I can answer any questions or be of assistance throughout your process.

Sincerely,



Jessica Beyer  
President & CEO

cc: Greater Mankato Legislative Delegation  
Commissioner Steve Grove