

MHILA
Maryland Hotel
Lodging Association

April 8, 2021

Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich
Executive Office Bldg.
101 Monroe St., Second Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Montgomery County Council
Stella B. Werner Council Office Bldg.
100 Maryland Ave.
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: Montgomery County gathering restriction of 25 people indoors

Dear County Executive Elrich and County Council Members:

As the statewide trade association representing Maryland's lodging industry, and especially on behalf of our members in Montgomery County, we urge the County Council and Health officials to align COVID-19 restrictions for "gatherings" in Montgomery County hotels with those in the surrounding region.

Early on in the pandemic, Safe Stay Guidelines were created by an advisory council comprised of leaders from all segments of the hotel industry, in accordance with CDC recommendations and insights from leading health and cleaning experts. The industry was quick to adapt and embrace these guidelines, taking steps to protect both employees and guests. We recognize the critical role we play in helping reduce the spread of COVID-19, while serving our communities and housing essential personnel, such as healthcare workers, first responders, and the National Guard, throughout this pandemic.

Currently, *with the exception of Montgomery County*, convention and banquet facilities throughout the state are able to host meetings, weddings, conventions, etc. at 50% max occupancy with strict adherence to social distancing and mask requirements. Restaurants and religious facilities in Montgomery County are able to operate at 50% capacity as of March 26, 2021. DC and Northern Virginia have announced an easing of certain restrictions impacting meetings at hotels.

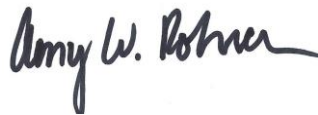
Hotel business is slowly coming back, with more and more individuals vaccinated every day, including 36% of Montgomery County residents having received their first dose and 23% fully vaccinated. However, business that is taking place now and into the future, is being booked outside of Montgomery County, due to the restriction of 25 people max gathering indoors. Montgomery County hotels are operating at a competitive disadvantage that only serves to further exasperate the devastating impact of the pandemic on the County's hotels as gatherings beyond 25 people resume elsewhere.

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Many of our hotels have very large meeting facilities with ballrooms as large as 23,000 square feet. These hotels could easily hold events that are socially distanced. An allowance for hotels to operate banquet space at 50% capacity would enable us to keep some of the meetings already confirmed, as well as open the door to begin soliciting for new business. These meetings would create sleeping room occupancies that would generate tax revenue for the county, allow us to bring back more of our currently laid off employees, and take a small step forward in recovery. Unfortunately, due to the current restrictions, there is confirmed business in the second and third quarter of 2021 looking to cancel, because they feel Montgomery County hotels will not be allowed to host their events.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration. I would welcome an opportunity to discuss this request in more detail.

Thank you,



Amy Rohrer, CAE
President & CEO

cc: Dr. Earl Stoddard, Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security
Dr. Travis Gayles, Montgomery County Health Officer
Ms. Kelly Groff, Visit Montgomery