

Dear Montgomery County Council,

I learned today that the County Executive has issued an Order forcing eating establishments to restrict indoor dining to 25% of capacity. I oppose this decision and request that the council also oppose it.

As one of the founders of Silver Branch Brewing Company, we and our employees depend on the revenue from patrons visiting our taproom. If there were evidence supporting an assertion that people dining out were responsible for rising rates, I would understand the proposed Order. However, based on what I have read, the increasing numbers being seen in many places are being attributed primarily to people visiting family, participating in public events, and other activities unrelated to dining out.

We take pride in being careful to enforce the mask mandate and social distancing, and have found that the vast majority of patrons respect and understand the need for it. We leave our large roll door open during service to ensure air circulation, even when it is cold outside. Moreover, we did not apply to expand our hours of operation past 10 o'clock because we accepted the idea that after 10 o'clock the nature of interactions might become less careful. Based on my observations at Silver Branch and interactions among friends and family in non-institutional settings, people visiting Silver Branch are much more careful than people visiting each other in their homes.

Proposing this action strikes me as an attempt to just try something rather than identifying a targeted approach with evidence to back it up. Has contract tracing determined that people eating out in Montgomery County has been the culprit for the recent increase in cases? Or is our County Executive proposing to inflict economic harm on businesses and their employees without evidence that it will address the root of the problem. I believe a focus on getting more residents to get tested generally, but especially prior to celebrations and visiting family for Thanksgiving, will prevent more cases than a blanket rule affecting businesses that are already struggling after over 7 months of the impact of COVID. As I noted above, we are following mask mandates and social distancing diligently, as are the other restaurateurs I have patronized and spoken with. With winter on our doorstep, many fewer people are going to be willing to come for outdoor seating. I request that Montgomery County seek to find other ways of getting residents to limit the spread of COVID than the approach proposed here.

Thank you,

Christian Layke

Co-Founder and CEO,  
Silver Branch Brewing Company