

Council members,

As a concerned citizen, I just wanted to share some thoughts about proposed or pending moves to reinstate a County-wide “stay at home” order, moves to ban indoor dining, and other measures proposed by Marc Elrich.

As a nearly lifelong resident of Montgomery County, I have a 40-year perspective on the county’s growth and changes that I think helps, and as a Professional whose clients are dozens of Montgomery County Small Business Owners, I have an added framework of seeing the impact of county legislation firsthand on the companies employing its tax payers (voters). Below are my bulleted comments with some news and data supporting these concerns:

Unwarranted business shutdowns instead of common sense COVID-19 protections – Governor Hogan’s leadership across the state lays out an appropriate level of protective measures that I would encourage the Council to adopt instead of proposed additional restrictions that show no proof of mitigating virus transmission. Any limitations on outdoor dining foolishly hurt only the businesses themselves, and as Governor Hogan expressed, “In all of our hundreds of discussions with all the top public health doctors and epidemiologists and experts, they told us in the very beginning that outdoor dining is safe.” Restrictions on indoor dining, especially for restaurants that have already gone to extreme measures to create as safe of a dining environment should also strongly be avoided beyond what the county has done, since the end result will not be statistically shown to protect residents, and will invariably shutter more [businesses](#) needlessly as we head into the Holidays. A leading HR firm estimated, “41,800 jobs will be lost in the hospitality and retail industries and **660 small businesses will be forced to permanently close** by late January just in the D.C. area alone.”

Magnified economic disparities – The harsh reality we all must face is that surviving the pandemic economically intact is very much a [luxury](#) based on capacity and wealth. Those hurt the hardest by pandemic shutdowns and restrictions: the working middle class, and [historically marginalized people groups](#). My heart breaks when I consider the raw truth, thousands of people who clawed their way for years to get above the poverty line will now have been shoved back below it once again. Flying well below the radar are the growing stories of record number of families needing food and financial assistance, rapid increase in homelessness, and worse yet, rapid increase in domestic abuse and violent crimes. What are you as council members doing about any of these things? What will your answer be to the person whose job was lost because of your restrictions, who cannot find alternative work, who has blown through what little savings he/she has, whose kids don’t get the lunch meal from school and who now is getting meal assistance, dealing with kids who are struggling to learn, and simply waiting for some kind of relief that is a long time coming? Do you simply say, “well, we did our best in the name of public safety!” I don’t think that’s good enough. The economic impact you are creating now in a period of weeks or months will be felt for a period of years if not an entire decade.

Long-term mental health effects – prolonged suppressed public dynamics, specifically “[virtual schooling](#)” and prolonged suppressed dining and commercial engagements, combined with the challenge of [grieving](#) in the various forms it will manifest, are going to be the invisible scars marking the decade to come. School restrictions need to come to an end... and soon. The raw meta [data](#) is just alarming. A writer from the Brookings institute captured it best, “the inequalities in our school systems are unfortunately anything but new. Our models cannot account for the reality that the crisis is having an unequal impact on our most underserved communities.” Learning virtually is absolutely a privilege. Struggling students and minority students are being massively impacted and set back an entire year. With a myriad of successes in local private schools as evidence (albeit, the personification of learning privilege) as well as data coming in from school systems that are slowly returning to in-person and **not**

seeing a case surge, it's time the County council acted in the best interests of the next generation of learners. Additionally, the County Council needs to recognize the Mental Health [Crisis](#) faced by its residents and move away from a pure protectionism strategy towards one of recovery and social inclusion. You cannot protect people's health forever but keeping them forcefully isolated – that's a diminutive way of reacting that lacks bigger picture objectivity. "Safety first" as a [policy](#) is deeply flawed over long periods of time. Long-term studies are likely to further expose the wellbeing disparities across race, gender and income which have already been highlighted during the pandemic, and need to be taken into deeper consideration when developing future responses.

I plan to make this testimony public for your upcoming hearing so that it can be a matter of record.

I trust you will take a holistic view when rendering critically important decisions, as the far-reaching consequences of these decisions will sadly last longer than the pandemic in many respects. I understand the magnitude of these decisions and do not wish to be in your shoes.

Thanks for your consideration and your service to the county.