



Dear President Hucker and Members of the County Council,

My name is Christopher Sargent. I am the Store Manager of the Wegmans supermarket located at 20600 Seneca Meadows Parkway in Germantown. I submit this testimony in opposition to the increased limits placed upon retail stores by the County Executive's proposed Executive Order 139-20. While no doubt well-intentioned, these restrictions will create severe problems for the ability of Montgomery County residents to obtain the food and medicines they need to sustain themselves.

Since the pandemic began, we have implemented many measures to keep our employees and our customers safe, including Plexiglas barriers, enhanced sanitation, signage and social distancing cues, and employee wellness screenings. My employees are required to wear masks and 99.99% of customers in the store are doing so as well. Since November 10, we have operated at the required 25% occupancy. This has permitted us to serve our customers while allowing them to socially distance while shopping. All of these measures have made my store a very safe place to work and to shop. On November 25 (the day before Thanksgiving), the store received a favorable report from a Department of Health inspector who observed that proper social distancing safeguards were in place and being observed by customers.

The County Executive now proposes a one-size-fits-all maximum of 150 persons for every retail establishment, regardless of size. Thus, a 30,000 square foot store could allow in the same number of customers as my store, which is over 124,000 square feet. From a customer safety standpoint, this makes no sense whatsoever.<sup>1</sup> My store can easily accommodate many more customers and still allow plenty of room to socially distance. 150 persons is 5.5% of the legal occupancy limit of my store.

A 150-person limit will force customers to wait in long lines, in winter weather, to gain access to my store. This will not enhance the health of these folks. If an individual chooses to shop in a smaller store which is subject to the same occupancy limit, they will be in a more crowded space than they would be in my store. In addition, some county residents may choose to travel to a nearby county and shop for food there. Most counties have been at a 50% occupancy limit for retail and some are now reducing that to 25%. Giving Montgomery County residents an incentive to travel elsewhere to obtain food and other essential items works against any other measures to contain the spread of the COVID virus.

Finally, we know from experience that, if people think that they will not be able to get food or other essential items, they will panic. Montgomery County should not create panic among its residents by imposing capacity limits that severely restrict their access to essential retail stores.

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<sup>1</sup> The County Executive's proposed order changed "customers" to "persons", which would, on its face, include employees as well as customers. I do not know if this was intentional. If the 150-person limit includes employees, I may be forced to close my store entirely to walk-in customers and will only be able to service online orders.



In conclusion, the current retail occupancy limits, along with all other requirements, are working to contain the spread of the virus. We have operated for over a month under these limits and have not had an increase in customer complaints, any outbreak of positive cases, and were able to serve our customers over the Thanksgiving holiday without any concerns from the Department of Health. There is no need to impose new draconian, one-size-fits-all requirements on essential retail stores that would have significant adverse consequences for the residents of Montgomery County. Please maintain the current limits.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my feedback.

Sincerely,

Christopher Sargent  
Wegmans Store Manager, Germantown