



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

May 5, 2020

Dear Governor Murphy,

I write to ask you to provide immediate relief to New Jerseyans by re-examining the scale and scope of current COVID-19 restrictions in place on businesses and communities alike. While certain protective measures such as the use of PPE and social distancing practices are essential to ensure the health and safety of New Jerseyans, I believe the degree to which certain restrictions are enforced can and should be relaxed. With a detailed, comprehensive set of guidelines that are clearly communicated to and enforced by business owners and community leaders, New Jerseyans can re-enter society safely without compromising their health or the health of others.

First and foremost, we must re-open our places of worship. In South Jersey, I have witnessed the police disperse multiple worship gatherings even though necessary precautions were followed. For example, Jeff McLeod of Rio Grande Baptist Church in Cape May, New Jersey, was threatened with arrest for hosting a gathering outside of his church. All the attendees remained in their cars, which were ten feet apart, and listened to the sermon through a radio broadcast. Churchgoing is a sacred weekly event for many of my constituents. These people are being told that their faith is considered “non-essential” and that practicing their religion subjects them to fine and other punishment. This infringes upon the very principles on which our nation was founded. You insist that essential businesses must remain open for the good of the public, and I respectfully ask that you allow churches practicing proper safety measures to reopen.

During this pandemic, there has been a significant burden placed on hospitals and every effort has been made to increase their efficiency and capabilities. Smaller hospitals and medical practices have experienced a decline due to restrictions on their business operations and the procedures they may perform – such as elective surgeries. This has proven to be a direct threat to their financial stability. I have heard many stories of constituents who live with daily pain and discomfort due to a limit on “nonessential” surgeries and medical procedures. While these procedures may not pose a direct and immediate health risk to my constituents, they are at risk of long-term unforeseen complications if these delays continue. These surgeries would not take away necessary equipment from those on the front lines fighting this pandemic and they would allow medical practices and smaller hospitals to keep their doors open.

Businesses across our state have experienced revenue losses, and in some cases, severe financial distress for six consecutive weeks as a result of state-wide COVID-19 restrictions. Whether it be

the mom-and-pop shops that have served our communities for generations, or a young business still trying to get off the ground, help is needed to ensure their survival. Immediate relief of restrictions for the businesses that comprise our communities is essential to ensure the New Jersey we call home is still there when these unprecedented days are behind us.

Our seasonal businesses in South Jersey depend on summer months and the tourists who come to our beautiful coastline. Should their operations be allowed to resume, there are several measures each business can take to maintain the health and safety of their customers. For example, charter boats can provide PPE and limit rides to smaller groups, and gun ranges can maintain space between individuals by restricting the availability of lanes. In addition, golf driving ranges are wide and expansive, allowing for social distancing practices to easily be implemented in a manner similar to gun ranges. Lastly, there has also been a resurgence in demand for drive-in movie theaters, which allow individuals to properly social distance in their cars.

It is heartbreaking to see small businesses that have been active shore community members for decades go out of business. Bicycle rental stands, for example, are being forced to close when they could easily require gloves and masks while properly sanitizing their equipment between uses.

Small businesses and places of worship are essential components of our society and I ask you to act immediately to come to their aid. These by far are not the only businesses and establishments impacted, they are just but a few examples. With your guidance and supervision, a gradual reopening will provide certainty and stability to our community. I look forward to working with your administration to mitigate the financial impact of the coronavirus as well as starting to reopen our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Van Drew', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jeff Van Drew
Member of Congress