

CITY OF BELLEVILLE, ILLINOIS



MARK W. ECKERT, MAYOR
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September 1, 2020

The Honorable J.B. Pritzker
Governor of Illinois
207 Statehouse
Springfield, Illinois 62706

Dear Governor Pritzker:

I agree with so many leaders who have spoken up from southwestern Illinois that the impending resurgence mitigation plan for Region 4 will greatly damage, and in many cases completely shutter, small businesses in our region.

I understand the severity of COVID-19 and have seen the impact on my community first-hand. At the same time, I greatly respect how your administration has managed the pandemic. The regular information and calls from your office are something that have assisted me and my administration when developing plans and implementing them throughout our city in response to the pandemic. However, the new mitigation rules that disallow indoor dining will end many of the small businesses that Belleville is built on.

I don't pretend to have the right answers, nor do I envy you in your role and responsibilities in having to lead the State of Illinois, but I can tell you, many, if not most, of the small restaurants and bars in Belleville will not survive the latest mitigation efforts. I do wish stronger considerations were made to how these efforts will impact the economic vitality of main streets throughout Illinois.

We are now coming to the fall of the year, where outdoor dining will be weather dependent. This makes it nearly impossible to predict how to manage a restaurant or bar that can only serve patrons outside. In fact, on a day like today, with heavy rain, outdoor dining would not be possible. Likewise, being so close to Missouri, I am afraid residents in southwestern Illinois will simply make the short drive to St. Louis for entertainment and dining purposes. We already know that many folks head to Missouri for certain items like gas and tobacco products as is. We will see more and more Illinois residents head to Missouri for dining and entertainment, while at the same time, increasing the risk of bringing the virus back to Illinois.

Many of the small restaurants and bars in Belleville have been compliant with the current mitigation strategies. The few who have not, have been approached and are now complying with the rules. We are enforcing the necessary practices and have even restricted local entertainment to no more than two musicians per restaurant to try to reduce crowds and eliminate any festival-like environments. Perhaps this is something the state might consider. I would urge you and your administration to consider how things like large private gatherings, big box store visits, and other unregulated activities might be impacting the community spread we are experiencing.

As a lifelong resident of this city, I have never seen Belleville business owners so worried about the uncertainty of their futures. Again, I truly understand the health concerns we are facing, but if these changes are a must, then I ask if there is any immediate assistance for our hospitality businesses as most will not survive.

With the utmost respect,

Mark W. Eckert, Mayor

CC: Senator Belt, Representative Hoffman, Representative Greenwood and Chairman Kern