



**Date: December 15, 2020**

**RE: Appeal to Oregon Governor and Legislature for Immediate Small Business Relief**

**To: Oregon Governor Kate Brown and Lane County Delegation to the Oregon legislature**

We are business and community leaders, contributors to matters of our community health, welfare, and economy. We want a safe Oregon, and also an Oregon that supports its businesses, their owners, and their employees. We appreciate that you are being asked to balance competing forces that have immeasurable impact on people's lives – the pandemic and people's livelihoods, safety, and security.

Oregon is a Small Business State. Our small businesses have demonstrated exceptional resiliency under the most extraordinary of circumstances. But too many of our small businesses will not survive the winter, and the health and welfare of our families and communities cannot thrive without them.

While news of a vaccine brings measured optimism, the best outlook for a full return to business may be a year away. Each day that passes without meaningful remedy and relief means another small business owner's dream fades, and another employee and family go without a paycheck. With that, so too falls opportunity and hope for the families and community members who are supported by them.

- **Our businesses have been extremely responsible to our community and have dutifully followed the Covid-19 guidance coming from the state. In addition, they have adopted the OSHA Covid-19 Temporary Standards, creating some of the of the safest and most sanitary workplaces for customers and employees to be.** Oregon has a rich tradition of supporting local businesses and seeing those businesses thrive. Our small businesses are unduly suffering the effects of the pandemic, at no fault of their own.
- **They have incurred exorbitant costs to implement mandated health and safety protocols, responded to ever-changing guidelines and regulations, and they have done their best to adapt new business models to carry them through reduced demand during critical consumer spending seasons.** But their resources are limited, and the prolonged and indefinite period of uncertainty they face are testing their ability to survive.
- **The remedies to small business currently being offered by the State are completely inadequate leaving little assurance to the small business owner whose confidence wanes daily with dropping revenues and depleting reserves. The economic damage to our local businesses and families is in the billions of dollars, not millions.** November's distribution of \$20 million of small business grants by Business Oregon closed after 15 minutes due to oversubscription. Similarly, the \$55 million offered by Governor Brown is wholly inadequate to match the current devastation in our local business community as evident by the 1600 Lane County small businesses applying for a \$3, 659,000 million given to Lane County for distribution; an average \$2,287 per business, barely enough to carry a day of fixed expenses of the smallest operation.

**You can change that by recognizing the critical role small business plays in sustaining our state's economy, and by prioritizing substantial remedies for small business employers.** Your efforts to pass well-balanced health and economic policy in forthcoming emergency or regular legislative session, can save countless small businesses and the families and communities that rely on them.



We encourage you to:

1. Provide a path for the safe reopening of *all* Oregon businesses who can comply and operate under recently released OR-OSHA Temporary COVID-19 Rules and Regulations;
2. Provide for substantial remedies to local small businesses that have, through no fault of their own, been forced to shut down, leaving employees out of work, and harming our local social and economic well-being;
3. Dedicate \$75 million of state dollars toward a Hospitality Relief fund dedicated to helping our state's restaurants and hospitality businesses recover;
4. Commit to a moratorium on new or increased taxes and fees at the state and local level; Direct or indirect, these increase the cost of business, goods, and services;
5. Provide for stabilization of the commercial rental market through a short-term tax credit for property owners that are willing to waive debt for commercial tenants that are behind on rent.

Small business is the Oregon Way and Oregon small businesses have demonstrated exceptional resiliency under the most extraordinary of circumstances. We fear the cost of failing to assist and support small businesses could be catastrophic for our local communities and for our Oregon economy. As recent Census Bureau polling indicates, even prior to the "Freeze" order:

- Nearly 43% of Oregon small businesses saw a drop in revenue last month.
- Nearly 25% of Oregon small businesses expect to need additional financial assistance.
- This last month more small businesses in Oregon have reduced employment (16.1%) than increased employment (3.0%).
- 29.9% of Oregonians expect to lose employment income in the next month.
- 7.2% are either not current on their rent or mortgage or have little confidence they can make next month's payment.
- On December 26, unemployment benefits for approximately 67,866 Oregonians will expire.

We welcome an opportunity to work with you on a balanced approach to remedy and relief for local business and economic impacts on our families and communities. And with deep respect, we look to you for leadership and ask that these concerns be addressed with expedient and substantive measures.

Respectfully yours,

Vonnie Mikkelsen, President and CEO, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce

Brittany Quick-Warner, President & CEO, Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce

Bettina Hannigan, President & CEO, Florence Area Chamber of Commerce

Kari Westlund, President & CEO, Travel Lane County