



# CITY OF HOUSTON

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Mayor

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The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Majority Leader  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
1237 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Speaker Pelosi,

This week, in an effort to help slow the inexorable progression of coronavirus through community spread, I reluctantly ordered a set of restrictions on restaurants, along with the complete closure of night clubs and bars. Restaurants can only offer delivery, pickup and drive-through services, with no in-dining service allowed. Unfortunately, these measures, and similar decisions by other political leaders around the region and state, will prove to be devastating to this industry and to hard working people.

Because of these necessary actions, an immediate aid package should be developed for the national restaurant and bar industry. Government officials are being forced to make tough decisions that are in people's best interests but will have a profound economic impact on their lives.

Prior to this emergency, 50 percent of food was supplied to Texans by the restaurant industry. We have seen the burden quickly shifting to grocery stores, and these stores are having difficulty meeting the demand. Low-income people will have an especially difficult time because they can't stockpile food.

According to the Texas Restaurant Association, the restaurant industry alone has a \$70 billion economic impact on the State of Texas and is the number two employer in the state behind health care. It is even ahead of oil and gas. One in four Texans is employed in a restaurant or bar, across 50,000 locations, amounting to nearly 1.4 million workers. This doesn't even include the three to four million employed in the associated supply chain.

The Houston region is even more reliant on the restaurant industry. The 4<sup>th</sup> largest employer in the Houston area, the restaurant industry employs over 300,000 people across more than 12,500 locations. The thriving Houston restaurant scene landed us the moniker "Culinary Capital of the South," adding to our economy with tourism, business development and international acclaim. Houstonians eat out 5-7 meals per week, on average (the highest in the nation), with some citizens eating more than 80 percent of their meals out.

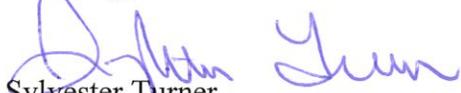
In addition to restaurants, Texas is home to more restaurant chain headquarters than any other state. Houston is also home to several major food distribution centers: Sysco (also their international corporate headquarters), US Foods, Gordon Foods, Jake's Finer Foods, and Ben E. Keith, to name a few. Each of these centers employs many people integral to the food supply beyond just restaurants.

I urge you to enable the State of Texas to declare an Economic Injury Disaster and make certain the Small Business Administration's (SBA) Economic Injury Disaster Loan program has adequate funding to help restaurant owners survive this looming calamity. In addition, I also urge you to extend cash benefits to those who lose their jobs. The menu of solutions that will assist the restaurant industry during this critical time should include direct aid to restaurants and employees, tax and fee adjustments, and mortgage, lease and loan payment relief.

With the predicted contraction of economic activity nationwide, these people will be unlikely to find adequate employment elsewhere if this situation continues. The Texas Restaurant Association is projecting near-term reductions of 500,000 jobs.

The restaurant and bar sector employs many low-wage workers who are often uninsured with little savings to weather this storm. **These hard-working Houstonians are not responsible for this situation.** We need to make sure that they are provided for. Please join me in ensuring these hard-working Americans are not left to weather this storm alone.

Sincerely,

  
Sylvester Turner  
Mayor