

Brendan Flanagan: New Wisconsin capacity limits punish responsible businesses

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When Wisconsin was first hit by the COVID-19 pandemic earlier this year, broad shutdowns of local businesses occurred, similar to what was happening elsewhere across the country. In order to mitigate the growth in the number of new cases, only a select few businesses were allowed to remain open. What ensued was [widespread uncertainty](#) for businesses of all sizes, with many doubting whether they would be able to reopen once the all-clear finally arrived.

Now, months later, we find ourselves having the same discussion. Over the last several weeks, Wisconsin has become one of the nation's COVID-19 hotspots. [Three of the top five metro areas](#) in the U.S. with the greatest number of new cases relative to their population are in Wisconsin, with eight communities in the state occupying spots in the top 20. Because of this, some areas are even facing [concerns](#) regarding available hospital space.

All of this prompted Governor Tony Evers to [again](#) scale back capacity for indoor business operations, limiting them to 25% capacity. However, as with Gov. Evers' earlier orders, this latest action was a misstep that ignores safety protocols already in place and will needlessly penalize businesses, including shopping malls and other retail establishments that sell a range of items Wisconsinites need.

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This is immediately apparent walking into just about any retail establishment. As soon as customers come through the door, they are reminded to put on a face covering and avoid coming into close contact with others in the store. Additionally, stores have stepped up their

cleaning procedures to ensure a sanitary experience for both customers and employees. All of these requirements have created a business environment that prioritizes health and safety, and they will be a key part of getting the state back on track.

With this new order, though, Gov. Evers risks putting more businesses on the edge of collapse. That means more jobs lost at a time when [nearly 100,000](#) Wisconsinites are still waiting on their unemployment claims from earlier in the pandemic to be processed. This could cause a level of economic ruin that would leave the state on an even longer and more difficult path to recovery than the one it is currently on.

If Gov. Evers is truly dedicated to reining in the virus and getting things under control in Wisconsin, he needs to refine this blanket order. Restrictions should not be based on what a store sells or what type of business they are. Instead, government officials should turn their attention to whether a business is taking the right steps to keep people safe. Overwhelmingly, retail establishments and shopping malls have been doing exactly that. In fact, retailers were among the first to require masks, even before some local leaders took steps to do the same. Rather than being punished by broad capacity restrictions or an eventual second wave of business shutdowns, these places should be recognized for the significant steps they have taken to keep people safe.

It's true that Wisconsin is currently experiencing a rapid and concerning growth in new COVID-19 cases. However, Gov. Evers and his administration cannot rush to roll out blanket executive actions that will only leave the state worse off than it was before. Instead, we need a response that addresses problem areas and ensures safety protocols are in place without putting an undue burden on places of business that have been working tirelessly to keep Wisconsinites safe. As we all know, Wisconsin winters arrive early and stay well past their welcome. If these kinds of indoor capacity limits are left in place much longer, this will be a difficult winter season for Wisconsin businesses, and many will be gone by the time the last snow piles melt.

— *Brendan Flanagan is a Democratic consultant and a veteran of Obama for America.*