

WMC, Restaurant Association charge gov with putting businesses at risk with new order

Posted on Monday, Oct 12, 2020

Business groups are charging the governor with putting businesses at risk with the order limiting indoor capacity to 25 percent.

The order, issued yesterday by DHS Secretary Andrea Palm, places new restrictions on bars, restaurants and other private businesses beginning 8 a.m. Thursday and will remain effect through Nov. 6.

It applies to any gathering at locations open to the public, including ticketed events. But that doesn't impact schools, office spaces, factories and other workplaces that are only accessible by employees or authorized personnel.

Gov. Tony Evers said the order was part of an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19 and help hospitals that are now overwhelmed with cases.

"We're in a crisis right now and need to immediately change our behavior to save lives," he said.

The Medical Society of Wisconsin supports the order limiting indoor public gatherings. The society's Board of Directors Chair Dr. Jerry Halverson said the state must halt its current COVID-19 case trajectory.

“Recent reports show that many of these COVID-19 cases are being traced back to larger gatherings, like weddings and sports-watching parties,” Halverson said. “We want to continue being the state leading the country in high-quality health care, not having one of the highest COVID-19 infection rates in the country.”

But Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce President and CEO Kurt Bauer argued that medical professionals have said the recent spikes are due to individuals not following the same strict safety guidelines that businesses have implemented.

“Unfortunately, Gov. Evers’ order will cause even more harm to already-suffering businesses while failing to actually slow the spread of COVID-19 in Wisconsin,” he said. “Our state’s employers have been true leaders when it comes to health and safety, and this order will just serve to economically punish them when they can least afford it.”

Kristine Hillmer, president and CEO of the Wisconsin Restaurant Association, had a similar sentiment.

“Restaurants have been heavily investing in sanitation procedures and staff education to ensure that dining at restaurants is safe, whether it’s inside, outside, curbside, carryout or drive through,” she said. “At 25% capacity, most restaurants will be faced with possibly closing their indoor dining since 25% capacity will not allow them to pay their bills.”

The Restaurant Association has 7,000 member locations, of which most will be faced with the decision to close doors permanently after facing the pandemic for the past seven months, Hillmer said. She said closures and layoffs are going to be “unavoidable” with the new order.

Meanwhile, the association is encouraging the governor to reconsider the statewide approach.

“Limits on capacity or enforcement are best done at the local level where they know what is happening in their own community,” Hillmer said.

Read more on the order at WisBusiness.com: <https://www.wisbusiness.com/>

-By Stephanie Hoff

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