



2801 Fish Hatchery Road | Madison, WI 53713 | 608.270.9950 | 800.589.3211 | FAX 608.270.9960 | wirerestaurant.org

January 17, 2022

Dear Honorable Members of the Milwaukee Common Council:

The Wisconsin Restaurant Association represents restaurants and bars throughout the State of Wisconsin including more than 200 members who operate within the City of Milwaukee. It is on their behalf that I urge you to oppose the proposed mask ordinance, file number 210628. This position comes after hearing from many restaurant and bar owners who feel that this ordinance is unnecessary and it would create even more setbacks for Milwaukee restaurants.

Restaurants and bars have been the hardest hit industry throughout this pandemic. Though last summer brought optimism for recovery, progress is now moving in reverse with many operators unsure if they will survive. According to data we gathered in December 2021, variants have dampened indoor dining at 46% of restaurants, 34% of operators think it will be 12+ months until business normalizes, and 17% think that their business will never fully recover.

The pressures placed on small businesses are immense at a time when finding employees is difficult. With 78% of restaurant operators indicating they are already understaffed, it is likely to get worse as employees go outside the City of Milwaukee to find jobs. In addition, enforcing an unpopular mandate is a burden to our hard working industry employees and puts them in a difficult position as they strive to provide quality service to their customers. As proved by the prior order, a mask mandate will cause confrontations for our front line staff putting them in physical and emotional danger. We have heard of many instances where these workers have been threatened, physically challenged, called names and spat at by those who don't agree with a mask mandate.

Consumers have a choices and even with the *suggestion* of a mask mandate, many are already moving their events and cancelling reservations at Milwaukee restaurants and event venues. Note that these dinners and events are still being held, but at facilities outside of the City. The result is that Milwaukee will not see any benefit in terms of tax revenue, hotel nights, and overall visits to all city businesses.

It should be noted that a mask mandate affects not only the business and their employees, it affects the City's vitality and long-term viability of its communities. Without these businesses, there will be less jobs, reduced tax revenue, and the impression of a City in decline, versus a community of growth and vitality. In the end, a mask mandate puts Milwaukee businesses at a competitive disadvantage and creates unnecessary conflict and stress for their employees. This is unfortunate when taking into context that Milwaukee is part of a larger region where there are no mandates.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristine Hillmer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kristine Hillmer
President & CEO
Wisconsin Restaurant Association