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Mayor Johnson, Members of the Milwaukee Common Council, and Health Commissioner Johnson:

On behalf of VISIT Milwaukee, I am writing to encourage you to vote against resolution 210628 Proposed Substitute A during today's Common Council meeting. The resolution for a mask ordinance, proposed Jan. 7 at the Public Safety and Health Committee meeting, does not benefit and may cause serious harm to our hospitality community. A community that includes VISIT Milwaukee's nearly 700 partners.

Our hotels, restaurants, bars, and venues are just getting back on their feet from the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020 alone our city lost hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenues, and the hospitality industry in Milwaukee lost more than 20,000 tourism-related jobs. Our city's small, locally owned businesses were forced to make decisions they may once again have to face if this mandate is put into place. This ordinance will put Milwaukee on an island and will be a crushing blow, setting our businesses and our community backwards yet again.

First, we will see revenue leave our city. Rather than spending their time and income in Milwaukee, consumers will instead choose from hundreds of options in the surrounding cities and counties not mandating masks. Second, thousands of employees will see their wages either deteriorate or disappear completely. Without the necessary revenue to drive these businesses forward, owners will be forced to make impossible decisions about their teams and operations. In order for any type of mask ordinance to be effective, it has to cover more than just the city of Milwaukee.

The most recent iteration of the proposed ordinance seems once again to place the duty of enforcement onto our frontline workers, putting them in physical and emotional danger. In the past these workers have been threatened, spit at, called names, and even physically challenged by

patrons strongly opposing mask mandates. These individuals are people who come to work each and every day with the notion of providing hospitality to their guests. Not a day goes by without seeing in the news or hearing through experience how our frontline workers are treated when enforcing mask mandates.

VISIT Milwaukee has demonstrated incredible commitment to acting in the best interest of our community. In fact, our organization was at the forefront of calling for a mask mandate in 2020. We paid for and distributed 50,000 masks in summer 2020 to ensure mask access to more people. We continue to encourage vaccines along with attention to safety measures like recommended masking when appropriate and necessary, taking care of and respecting each other, as well as proper sanitation and health protocols for businesses.

The hospitality and tourism industry prides itself on taking care of its customers and the community. We must continue to have faith in and respect these businesses to properly adhere to health and safety standards as well as recommendations that allow them to be fully operational.

The pandemic is serious to be sure, but we have tools at our disposal that we did not in 2020 besides mandating masks. This proposed ordinance would create another patchwork of rules that only impact Milwaukee, isolating our city even further from our neighbors. Neighbors who, in turn, will enjoy the fruits of Milwaukee's lost business.

We must work together and find flexibility rather than drawing lines in the sand with unenforceable mandates. Please vote "no" and protect the businesses and employees working to move our city forward.

Thank you.



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