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Council Members,

I am providing written and video testimony for the November 5, 2020 meeting, on the topic of Executive Order 122-20, regarding the acceptable size of public gatherings and proper social distancing. Contained in the order is a specific notation for 'bowling alleys,' with a ordered limitation of 25 people in an undefined area, or 25% of capacity, whichever is less.

I submit this testimony because Montgomery County leaders have taken pride for as long as I can remember on making public policy decisions based on science and data, and it appears this order runs counter to that tradition.

Current scientific thought as provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) addresses the probability of transmission of COVID-19 as a function of crowd density, proper use of masks, and effective social distancing. Taking that into account, this Executive Order appears to be arbitrary and constructed without sufficient data and first-hand knowledge of the sport, and how Montgomery County bowling managers are addressing these necessary attributes while also continuing to operate in a safe manner.

At this time, only one bowling center in Montgomery County is in operation, that of Bowl America Gaithersburg on Clopper Road. I am a longtime league bowler at this facility and can offer both data and anecdotal knowledge of how the facility addresses the potential for transmission of COVID-19.

The Physical Dimensions of Bowling

It is important to acknowledge certain physical data, which the center uses in order to achieve proper social distancing while also continuing competition.

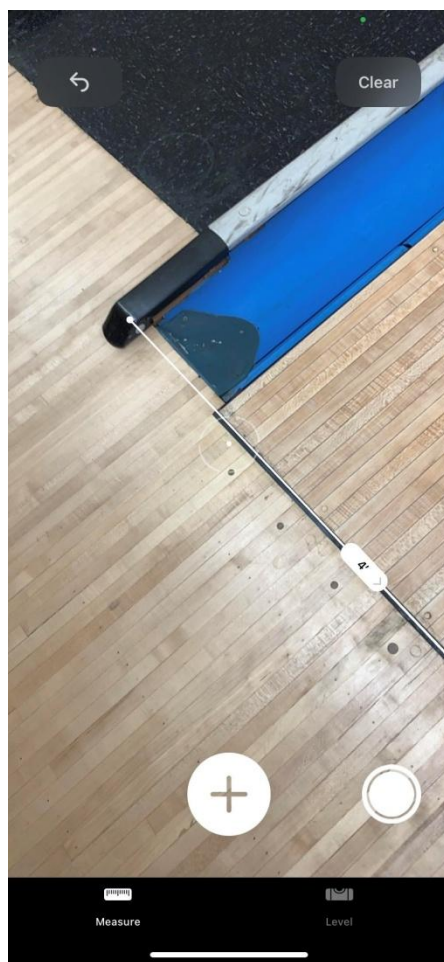
A standard bowling lane is approximately 3 feet, 3 inches (1 meter) in width from edge to edge, without taking into account the gutters. (Photo 1)



The area between each lane, known as the gutter gap, is 26.5 inches (approximately 2.2 feet) wide, including the gutters.



With the gutters included, a single lane is 4 feet from side to side.



The total width for one pair of lanes, then, would be more than 10 feet (or 3 meters), well beyond the CDC's recommended social distance separation of six feet. Our Thursday night league at Bowl America currently bowls with just one team on a pair of lanes, with a pair of lanes between any other participants, causing a total distance between teams of more than 20 feet.

Please note the short video I have also attached with my testimony. This is from Wednesday evening at a center in Frederick Maryland, which operates in a somewhat similar manner. Note how widely spaced bowlers are competing in that league. This is significant because the league in Frederick has teams separated by only one lane, not two, and yet there is a sufficient and safe distance between players at all times. This distance is half of what Bowl America mandates for play in the Gaithersburg center.

Also, note that each player is wearing a mask, as required by the State of Maryland and Frederick County, and that no player shares equipment with anyone else, similar to the rules in place in Gaithersburg. No spectators are allowed, no family members; only active participants.

Through more than six weeks of league play at Frederick, there are no reported cases of COVID-19 from the members of this league, attributed to proper due diligence by the center operators, the cooperation of players in the league, and the stringent use of masks, social distancing, and maintaining a low crowd density.

In Gaithersburg, the Thursday league competes with 9 teams of 5 members each, maintaining a larger separation between participants, also lessening the density between players, and enforcing the use of masks to control any potential spread of the virus.

Through five weeks of competition in the Thursday league, there are also no reports of transmission of COVID-19 between participants.

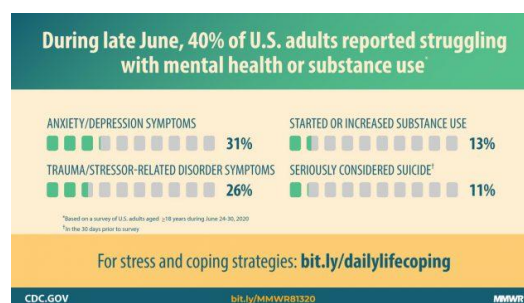
The Size of the Center and Potential Viral Exposure

The Executive Order does not address the physical size of the building interior, and areas in which bowlers participate. It only arbitrarily chooses a number of participants without taking density into account.

Bowl America is a 48-lane center, the largest in our county. With even twice the current number of participants allowed (50), Bowl America could easily ensure proper social distancing, a low participant density, and a subsequent lowering of the risk of transmission. Reducing the number to 25 participants at any one time given the size of the facility does not make scientific nor good business sense.

The Social Cost of the Executive Order

Scientific data on the effect of continued isolation is clear; chemical and substance dependencies are up, suicide and crime rates are also seeing similar rises, and the human toll of continued separation and a lack of social interaction is growing more severe. See the associated graphic from the CDC:



The CDC's continued reporting on this topic is available at:
<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>

A relevant excerpt: *"Elevated levels of adverse mental health conditions, substance use, and suicidal ideation were reported by adults in the United States in June 2020. The prevalence of*

symptoms of anxiety disorder was approximately three times those reported in the second quarter of 2019 (25.5% versus 8.1%), and prevalence of depressive disorder was approximately four times that reported in the second quarter of 2019 (24.3% versus 6.5%)"

Significant scientific data indicates that a primary driver of this problem is directly the result of continued isolation and a lack of hope that there is an end in sight to COVID-19.

Currently, one of the few physical and social activities allowed under COVID restrictions is bowling. Removing the regular weekly social interaction and competition between players, many of whom have participated with friends and acquaintances for years, if not decades, would constitute a severe blow to many people in Montgomery County.

Revenue and Tax-generation Loss Associated with the Order

There is a likely cost associated with lowering the number of players allowed to participate that may cause a ripple effect that cannot be easily mitigated. That is, allowing only a small number of participants at any one time will lower bowling center revenue to where it no longer makes business sense to operate the center.

The industry is already experiencing a severe downturn in league participation, casual 'open' bowling, events such birthday parties and weekend excursions, and in many cases, a loss of tournament play for serious competitive players.

There is a further loss when revenue from food and beverage sales are taken into account. This revenue also represents taxable income for Montgomery County and the State of Maryland.

A number of jobs at the center would also likely be eliminated; while this would be a relatively small number, those jobs are critical for the people filling them, as they are attempting to work to survive the virus-related recession instead of depending on government subsidies. That cost cannot easily be quantified, but there is a cost and the Council should consider it.

Conclusion

The council should reconsider or reject the arbitrary 25-person limit. At the very least, prior to issuing such an order, Montgomery County leaders should further investigate and experience the business they are attempting to regulate; such an executive order may spell the closure of a vital recreational resource in the area.