

Dear Montgomery County Council,

I'm writing to testify against the proposed additional restrictions on business and gathering sizes in our county. Limiting businesses to 25% capacity is not only ineffective in stopping the spread of Covid-19, but is also extremely detrimental to business owners and members of the community whom said businesses serve. Additionally, County Executive Elrich has neglected to provide data proving that these measures are justified and effective. These are both standards that must be met in order for such drastic action to be considered. The data that has been provided is flawed, and it is with this point that I wish to begin.

By the county health department's own admission, the county case positivity rate does not take into account whether the same individual has tested positive for the virus more than once, and therefore does not represent the true prevalence of the virus in our community (<https://www.mymcmedia.org/elrich-issues-order-to-reinstate-covid-19-restrictions-this-is-something-we-just-have-to-do/?fbclid=IwAR3wC19zpQ4oQYLOZ8HdIAAdOZS6VNVIS3Z00sxBkl0kdsES54Qp37ki4AGI>). Many people who get tested are people who must provide a negative test result in order to go back to work from which they may have taken leave after falling ill, or to travel, etc. These people often get tested each day until they receive a negative result. If we do not take this into account when calculating the County's test positivity rate, we cannot expect the figures to be accurate. It is unfair to ask businesses to restrict themselves when we have not even provided them with complete and accurate data.

Additionally, contact tracing has shown that bars are not a primary site of transmission, again, by the county health department's own admission (<https://www.mymcmedia.org/elrich-issues-order-to-reinstate-covid-19-restrictions-this-is-something-we-just-have-to-do/?fbclid=IwAR3wC19zpQ4oQYLOZ8HdIAAdOZS6VNVIS3Z00sxBkl0kdsES54Qp37ki4AGI>). Yet, food and beverage establishments, under the proposed order, would be required to stop serving alcohol after 10:00PM. Why? Covid-19 is not known to be more contagious after 10:00PM. There is no scientific evidence to show that limiting alcohol consumption at night is relevant to slowing the spread of any virus. If the county has data that indicates the contrary, they ought to produce it before enacting further restrictions. Businesses have a right to know exactly what kind of risk they are facing that prevents them from operating as usual, and are owed more transparency on issues like these that seem to lack clear scientific backing.

I would also like to point out that limiting traffic to churches, restaurants, etc... has not in general shown to be effective in limiting the number of deaths from covid-19. States such as Iowa, Tennessee, and South Dakota, who do not currently have capacity limits at these establishments are not seeing a higher death rate than Maryland, whereas states such as New York, new Jersey, and Illinois have a significantly higher death rate, in spite of having even tighter restrictions than Maryland (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1109011/coronavirus-covid19-death-rates-us-by-state/>). If we look on the international scale, countries with the strictest lockdowns (Argentina, Peru), are also among the countries with the highest death rate, suggesting that limiting in-person interaction among healthy people is counterproductive in

saving lives

(https://mobile.twitter.com/DrEliDavid/status/1295107313636909059?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1295107313636909059%7Ctwgr%5Eshare_3&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fthespectator.info%2F2020%2F08%2F20%2Fcountry-with-strictest-coronavirus-lockdown-policies-now-has-highest-death-rates%2F) The metric we should be monitoring is not raw case count, as PCR tests are notoriously oversensitive and often detect dead or inactive virus particles rather than active infections. This was confirmed by Dr. Anthony Fauci just this week: <https://lbry.tv/@mkey:1/Fauci-spills-the-beans-on-the-cycle-threshold>. Rather, we must examine hospital capacity and actual death rate.

Case numbers are limited only by the amount of testing done. So what are the estimates for the total infection rate, considering many countries across the globe (especially those with less resources) have decided to slow or stop testing? According to The World Health Organization on "roughly 10% of the global population has had the coronavirus, which suggests that widely used case trackers are a vast understatement of the real scope of the pandemic.

"Our current best estimates tell us that about 10% of the global population may have been infected by this virus," according to Mike Ryan, the executive director of WHO's Health Emergencies Program.

Based on a global population estimate of 7.6 billion, it would mean 760 million people have been infected by the virus.

If an estimated 760 million people have been infected by the virus, and according to John Hopkins University there have been 1.151 million total global deaths up to this point, how dangerous is that?

If we divide 1.151 million deaths by 760 million infected to get a closer idea to the actual fatality rate. $1.151/760 = 0.0015144$. That's a 0.15% chance of dying from COVID-19.

Let's compare that to the 2018 flu season deaths in the USA. 45,000,000 infections estimated by the CDC, and 61,000 estimated deaths.

We can divide 61,000 deaths by 45,000,000 infections and we get the 2018 flu's fatality rate: 0.0013555. 0.135% chance of dying.

0.13% vs 0.15%. The odds of dying of Covid-19 appear to be just slightly higher than those of seasonal influenza. If we do not limit our business activity for the flu, why are we doing so for Covid? In fact, for all but the oldest age groups, Covid has been shown to be even less deadly than the flu. At this time, Covid is not even among the top 10 causes of death, which brings me to my next point.

While Covid deaths are a mere fraction of what they were in the spring, deaths from other causes related to the restrictions on normal life and business (such as the proposed 25%

capacity limit) are skyrocketing. Drug overdoses and suicides have increased significantly since April, and heart attacks and strokes continue to be the number one cause of death in the United States. It has been shown that stress is a strong contributor to heart failure and related conditions, and is the main contributor to suicides and drug overdoses. It may be difficult to imagine heart stopping levels of stress for people like us who are able to comfortably work from home during this time and continue receiving our regular salaries, but it is a real problem among those of us who are reduced to 25% of their usual income overnight and are concerned about their ability to pay mortgages, rent, and feed their families. Their businesses are essential to their livelihoods. Covid is not the only, or even the main threat to the lives of the vast majority of Montgomery County residents, and a monomaniacal focus on keeping the case count down is counterproductive to public health and social well-being.

Closing businesses is also counterproductive for county finances. Taxes collected from businesses make up a large part of Montgomery County's budget. What's more, our vibrant restaurant community, featuring foods from our diverse population is part of what attracts new residents to Montgomery County. To give a personal example, one of the things my fiancé and I love the most about living in Montgomery County is the variety of international cuisines we have access to in walking distance. Seeing these businesses be forced to close through no fault of their own (which several have even under the 50% capacity limit) is disheartening. Another aspect of Montgomery County that many residents love are our beautiful parks, whose upkeep is mostly publicly funded. With a dramatic reduction in public funds, this will also become more challenging. Overall, limiting businesses to 25% capacity is very risky and detrimental to public health. To be worth this immense cost, the county must provide compelling evidence that

1. Covid-19 represents a far more serious threat to public health than the effects of inevitable business closures; and
2. The proposed limit on gatherings and businesses would have an irrefutably clear effect on reducing deaths from Covid-19

The county had not satisfied either of these criteria with the data available at this time. In light of such, it is my view, and the view of many of Montgomery County business owners that the proposed restrictions will do more harm than good and should not be implemented. Please give Montgomery County businesses a fighting chance and do not approve this order.

Sincerely,

Katja Harper