

Resolution to approve an Executive Order 19-21, COVID-19 Local Order - Amending and Restating Order dated December 15, 2020

Montgomery County restaurants have suffered under the onerous restrictions put upon them by the County Executive and Council. All the other jurisdictions in the area have opened up indoor dining, including Prince George's County and the District of Columbia prior to this. Northern Virginia has not issued a second ban on indoor dining at all.

Studies have shown that less than 7 percent of Covid-19 cases can be traced to dining in restaurants, whereas over 70 percent can be traced to private gatherings. By limiting choice for residents to go to restaurants where social distancing and mask-wearing are enforced, you are forcing residents into situations where those precautions may or may not take place.

What is the net result of being the last to open up indoor dining? DC opened up on January 22nd. My family has been going to DC restaurants since then, spending dining dollars and paying meal taxes that we would normally have spent in Montgomery County. Those are tax dollars that Montgomery County has lost. In addition, several of our favorite Montgomery County restaurants have now closed because they could not survive this anti-business climate. Those are more business and meal tax dollars that are permanently gone.

Lifting the indoor-dining restrictions is a step in the right direction. However, you are placing undue burdens on restaurant owners with the one-hour restriction on indoor dining. This one-hour restriction is capricious and appears to be simply an attempt to show that Montgomery County has a stricter policy than any other jurisdiction in the state. What fine dining restaurant can serve patrons in an hour? This appears to be an attempt to discourage both restaurants and patrons from seeking indoor dining. More restaurants will close and your tax base will shrink even further.

I would encourage the County Council to amend the Executive Order to omit the one-hour dining policy restriction. Let the residents of Montgomery County decide for themselves whether they feel comfortable dining indoors. Small business owners will remember the policies put forth during this pandemic when the next election comes around and vote accordingly.

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