Dear Council Members,

Montgomery County theatres have been closed for one year without income. While we are exciting at the prospect to allow them to reopen March 26, 2021 at reduced capacity, we are concerned about language in the proposed regulation that would prevent "arts and entertainment facilities" from selling or permitting food for consumption in the facility.

This would be a real problem for movie theatres.

Due to the financial model of theatres, the lion’s share of our box office receipts goes to the film studios. In order to supplement the limited balance, movie theatres rely on their concession sales to pay employee wages, utilities, rent and more. Without those sales, it is not financially viable for a theatre to open and operate.

We are concerned that the additional burden of taking away their concession sales will lead to bankruptcies and permanent closure of some of Montgomery County's theatres.

We are all hopeful for a reconsideration of this restriction on food and beverages before any Montgomery County theatres are closed forever, and respectfully request the regulation be amended as such.

As outlined previously with Montgomery County leadership, NATO (National Association of Theatres) worked with leading epidemiologists to create industry protocols for the safe reopening of theatres, which includes concession operations. Known as CinemaSafe, our theatres throughout the county have been following these protocols along with all the state guidelines. To date, not one COVID-19 outbreak has been traced back to movie theatres anywhere in the world. The CinemaSafe guideline is available at https://www.cinemasafe.org/.

Keep in mind that theatre patrons are facing forward, are not talking, and are sitting in fixed seating at least six feet apart from other guests. The auditoriums are well-ventilated with high ceilings, and guests have very little interaction between others during their visit. While they are not eating, they are required to wear their masks.

We had a strong industry before the pandemic; we expect to have one after. We are asking for your support to help us get there. Please allow movie theatres to reopen along with their concession stands, and provide food and beverage service to their theatre guests as part of their whole movie-going experience. Let's not add to the loss of this important cultural and family activity in Montgomery County.

Respectfully Submitted,

Doug Murdoch
Executive Director