

Esteemed Members of the Montgomery County Council,

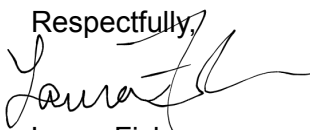
My name is Laura Fisher. My fiancé and I grew up in Montgomery County, graduated from MCPS schools, and now are both high school teachers in MCPS. Throughout the challenges of the past year, we have been grateful for Montgomery County's leadership in trying to keep us, our families, our students, and all residents safe. We are happy to be back in school buildings, and to start to return to "normal." We continue to navigate the challenges of hybrid instruction, while also planning our June 2020 wedding (postponed from last June). As of right now, we are allowed only 23 guests at our wedding reception (to make 25 total with us included), despite the fact that our venue is spacious enough for far more than that number to appropriately distance from each other. I write to you today to plead that you vote to allow event venues, such as those for weddings, to be allowed to operate at 50% capacity by May 1.

This week, the council will consider an amendment to health regulations so that graduation ceremonies can be held at a certain percentage of the maximum capacity of the venue. I support that amendment, understanding the importance of graduation ceremonies, and knowing firsthand that Montgomery County Schools have the space to allow for safe gatherings. It only seems right to make an amendment to the existing rules for such momentous events as a graduation and a wedding. As we struggle to plan for our upcoming event, my fiancé and I have trouble understanding the logic behind what is permissible now and what is not. For example, restaurants are able to operate at 50% capacity, and the two of us are required to supervise large groups (well above 25) of maskless teenagers during their lunch period at school. However, we cannot invite 50 family members to celebrate with us, despite the fact that most of them are already fully vaccinated. Moreover, the guests we hope to invite share our interest in making our celebration a safe one. We know they would be amenable to quarantining leading up to the event as well as getting negative test results before and after. Our family members will do everything they can to help us pull off some semblance of the wedding we've been planning for nearly two years. We certainly do not dismiss the threat of new COVID variants. However, we are confident that we can gather without contributing to the spread of the disease.

We believe this request would simply make our regulations more equitable across different sectors. In the same way that restaurants and small businesses have suffered financially as a result of the pandemic, we and our wedding vendors have taken many losses. As I'm sure you understand, the cost of planning our wedding has been significant. We've already lost money from deposits with vendors who have declared bankruptcy. If we cannot have our event on June 26, we will lose thousands more, which is significant to us as young educators paying for our own wedding. The businesses we have contracted have struggled so much financially that they cannot afford to be flexible with refunding us, unfortunately. Please vote to allow venues to open at 50% capacity by May 1.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Respectfully,



Laura Fisher