



# State of Connecticut

SENATOR LEONARD A. FASANO  
SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

34<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING  
300 CAPITOL AVENUE, SUITE 3400  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591  
[www.SenatorFasano.com](http://www.SenatorFasano.com)

HARTFORD: (860) 240-8800  
TOLL FREE: (800) 842-1421  
FAX: (860) 240-8306  
[Len.Fasano@cga.ct.gov](mailto:Len.Fasano@cga.ct.gov)

May 1, 2020

Governor Ned Lamont  
Office of the Governor  
210 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

Mr. Paul Mounds  
Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor  
210 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Governor Lamont and Mr. Mounds:

While I appreciate the efforts of Dr. Ko and Ms. Nooyi and the concepts they laid out for the first phase of reopening Connecticut, I have serious concerns about waiting until May 20th to start this process. I also have concerns about these proposals being created by a select few individuals, without the help of legislators elected to represent the voices of the people and without the help of even the greater Reopen CT Advisory Committee members.

The plan as proposed would reopen small retail establishments, outside activities and outside dining no earlier than May 20, 2020. Connecticut's large retailers are already open and have been operating throughout the pandemic by implementing multiple safety precautions. This begs the question, why can't smaller retail stores, which have less foot traffic and are easier to clean and manage, reopen next week using the same methodology as the big stores that have been open even during the peak of the pandemic? Why are small retail stores and their workers punished for another 20 days for no justified reason? If the formula for safety precautions was good enough for big stores to remain open this entire time, why can that formula not be applied to small stores now, giving them a week to make any needed changes? To force smaller retailers to remain closed for another 20 days when the protocols exist and are working in liquor stores, grocery stores and big box stores, is frankly cruel to the workers and employers of small mom-and-pop shops in every city and town in our state.

Regarding outside activities, those are already happening today. Most beaches and parks are not closed down and simply require social distancing practices. Your list, for example, includes mountain biking, which is something that can be done now keeping distance from other bikers. Those few areas that are closed I believe are and will have increasing trouble enforcing any closures as the days get warmer. Why can't the state make a clear statement and communicate to the public a clear message on the importance of keeping safe distancing while in these outdoor areas where social distancing can easily be respected? It seems to me to wait another month just to make a statement that we are reopening recreational areas that people are already using begs the question of what this delay is really all about.

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I have similar concerns regarding restricting restaurants to outdoor dining. First, many restaurants don't have outdoor dining already and therefore they would continue to be closed. Second, if you are a restaurant that doesn't have outdoor dining but want to expand outdoors you would still need local zoning approval, public health approvals and a liquor license specifically for outdoor areas. If liquor is served outside, there are also rules that the area would need to be fenced off. Third, if a restaurant is only allowed to have outdoor dining, they can't take reservations because it is always weather dependent which creates uncertain schedules for employees. Workers will have to weigh temporary unemployment benefits and the temporary \$600 in federal assistance against returning to work at a time when paychecks could be uncertain. Fourth, I do not see why large restaurants with ample indoor space cannot separate tables inside and implement additional precautions if they are allowed to operate outdoors. If someone touches a service outdoors versus inside, it still needs to be sanitized the same. Why couldn't larger restaurants allow indoor seating with greater distance between tables and implement the same protections that will be allowed for outside dining? Small restaurant owners have made it clear that they understand the need to separate tables, wear face masks and gloves, and sanitize or dispose of menus, place settings etc. We know what needs to be done, but we are telling people they still must wait another 20 days to return to work.

Finally, I remain greatly concerned about having a limited number of people make significant decisions on reopening our state that will impact our residents for years to come. Legislators are not being included in a collaborative process to make these decisions. I even have concerns about the majority of the Reopen CT Advisory Group not contributing to the forming these decisions but rather serving as simply a rubber stamp for a select few. I know the leaders of your Advisory Group are working hard and I thank them for their efforts, but this state is not represented by one or two people. It is represented by many lawmakers who were elected to be the voice for constituents from all walks of life across our state. Decisions of this great impact need to be made collaboratively. Simply telling lawmakers what you are going to do after a decision has already been made is not collaboration.

We have now seen two weeks of hospitalization decreases of significant magnitude. I can understand waiting another seven to 10 days. I cannot understand waiting another 20 days, 30 days or even longer to start safe reopening. People are scared about their economic future. Small businesses are scared about being able to keep people employed and actually exist in the future. We are already employing many precautions to keep customers and workers safe at certain establishments, but not all, and that discrepancy should be addressed as soon as possible. It seems relatively simple, the state should be setting the rules that the experts believe are necessary to protect people. The state should be defining what is safe for social distance, masks, gloves, etc. and then let businesses determine how they can accomplish those goals. Just like you did for big manufacturers, liquor stores, take-out dining, and large retailers like Target, Walmart and Home Depot, you can set the safety guidelines and businesses can figure out how to best achieve those goals. They just need to know the rules.

Clearly our state needs to do everything we can to protect the vulnerable populations who are most impacted by the virus. It is clear from all the state, federal, and worldwide data that older individuals and those with compromised immune systems are at risk and we need to protect them. But it is also apparent that the rest of the population is at far lower risk and should be able to choose the level of self-precautions they take during this time when their risk is not heightened to the level of others.

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What is abundantly clear is that small businesses and their workers are the backbone of Connecticut and every day we delay getting these folks back to work we are worsening the state's economic problems in the long run, which will have a cascading effect on the state budget, on core social services, and on the most vulnerable populations. The budget will have to dramatically cut discretionary funding which is either social services or municipal funding. That will have significant consequences, some of which could be life-threatening. This is far more than an economic crisis. It will lead to an even bigger social services crisis than we are facing today. Now is the time to act cautiously but also with immediacy and urgency. I ask that you move the time frame from May 20 to May 10 and allow this state and the people of Connecticut to rebound.

Sincerely,



Len Fasano  
Senate Republican Leader

cc: Indra Nooyi  
Dr. Albert Icksang Ko