

July 6, 2020

The Honorable Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr.  
Governor, State of Maryland  
Chair  
National Governors Association  
444 North Capitol St NW #267  
Washington, DC 20001

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor, State of New York  
Vice Chair  
National Governors Association  
444 North Capitol St NW #267  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Governors Hogan and Cuomo,

On behalf of America's leading retailers, thank you for all you do to keep our communities safe. Governors, mayors, and law enforcement bear the enormous task of protecting the welfare of entire communities during this unprecedented crisis, and retailers are committed to continuing our role as an essential partner in this effort. We greatly appreciate the partnership many governors and mayors have developed with state retail associations, who have served as integral advisors between leading retailers and policymakers.

The coronavirus pandemic is unlike any crisis our nation has faced in modern times. The twin impacts of a health crisis and economic collapse have caused enormous strain on families across the nation, and without a vaccine or effective treatment millions of Americans are still at risk. Leading retailers have been at the forefront of this crisis; first, as essential outposts to provide families and first responders with the food and supplies they needed to shelter down and stay safe. Second, leading retailers have worked tirelessly since the onset of this crisis to develop protocols for keeping employees and customers safe.

### **Investing in Safety is Essential**

In early May, retailers unveiled a [Blueprint for Safe Shopping](#), a guide for both policymakers and businesses to consult as the economy moved toward a phased re-opening. The goal of the retail industry since the outset of this pandemic has been to homogenize policy to the greatest extent possible, to move away from conflicting state and local orders, away from designations like essential/non-essential, and towards a set of leading recommendations by which all retailers could operate safely. To that end, retailers have invested billions in new training, sanitization procedures, PPE, and safety protocols; all designed to keep employees, customers, and the communities they serve safe. While no business can completely eliminate risk, we are confident the measures leading retailers have implemented greatly minimize the possibility of COVID-19 spread and are the right approach for the country until there is widespread immunity from the virus.

### **A Uniform Approach is Essential**

The patchwork of local mandates many retailers faced earlier this year made it incredibly difficult to focus on implementing the right safety protocols. While well-intended at the time, conflicts stemming from local law enforcement agencies applying their own interpretations of conflicting state and local mandates forced retailers to shift valuable time and resources away from store operations. We strongly urge governors to continue issuing concise, statewide orders that create clarity for all businesses, local governments, and law enforcement. Conflicting orders

and guidelines from counties and municipalities creates confusion for employees and customers, and ultimately leads to conflict.

## **Social Distancing and Wearing a Mask are Essential**

Keeping retailers and other critical segments of the economy open requires everyone to observe common-sense practices around hygiene and social distancing. That includes wearing a mask or face covering while shopping or in a public space. While the recommendations around wearing masks at the outset of this pandemic were ambiguous—in part because of the severe national shortage of PPE—the impact of combining distancing with masks is now abundantly clear. Leading retailers are requiring employees to wear masks or face coverings during their shift, and we are encouraging customers to do the same.

Despite compliance from the majority of Americans, retailers are alarmed with the instances of hostility and violence front-line employees are experiencing by a vocal minority of customers who are under the misguided impression that wearing a mask is a violation of their civil liberties. Wearing a mask is not about fear, and it certainly should not reflect one's politics. Wearing a mask is about respecting others and preventing the spread of a deadly disease. This should no longer be up for debate.

## **Your Leadership is Essential**

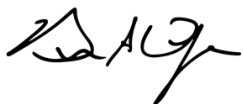
We urge every governor to require consumers who are not incumbered by a medical condition to wear masks when shopping or in public spaces. We know that seemingly healthy people can be infected and contagious, and we've seen firsthand how a seemingly innocent trip to a bar, restaurant, or house party without a mask can lead to an explosion of infections in communities where caseloads had previously flattened. Your voice is an incredibly effective tool to communicate the importance of treating one another with compassion and respect. Retailers commend the governors who have chosen to lead on this issue by requiring citizens in their state to wear a mask, and we respectfully ask that those governors that haven't yet required masks in public to do so immediately.

Given the troubling incidents we have all seen on social media involving aggressive customers refusing to wear a mask, we strongly recommend store employees not be charged with primary enforcement of mask mandates and that retailers not be fined for a customer's non-compliance. Retailers are using extensive signage at entrances and throughout the store to enforce safety policies, and we recommend this be the role of retailers and their employees—to clearly communicate policy, but not physically confront customers.

Basic safety precautions like social-distancing and mask wearing—when properly enforced and not politicized—are important tools. When combined with the investment retailers are making in sanitization and safety, we are confident that retailers can remain open and safely serve the public throughout this crisis.

The retail industry greatly appreciates your continued partnership. We share your commitment to putting the safety of communities first and stand ready to assist in any way as you focus on strategies to keep the economy open, and for workers to get paychecks during this pandemic.

Brian Dodge



President  
Retail Industry Leaders Association

