May 21, 2020

Honorable Tom Wolf
Governor of Pennsylvania
via email

Dear Governor Wolf:

On behalf of our Board of Directors, our members and thousands of businesses and citizens, we write to you today with one message: It is time to Re-Open Chester County, and Pennsylvania.

As we have done with the Small Business Administration, our County Commissioners and Chambers across the nation, state and County, we stand ready, willing and able to support your administration in immediately guiding, training and supporting businesses in re-opening safely and promptly. It is an economic, psychological and moral imperative.

From the day of your first Executive Order—9 weeks ago, we have closed our businesses and sacrificed our families’ incomes for the greater good. Respectfully, we did so not only because of your Executive Order; but also, we believed we were helping our neighbors, our community and the common good. We wanted to help “flatten the curve” and protect our hospitals and the men and women working there from being over-run. We wanted to avoid the gut wrenching scenes from Italy.

Today, we all know that the curve has flattened. Thankfully, Pennsylvania’s hospital beds are mostly empty, and very few ventilators are being used across our state. Together, we have accomplished that mission.

Yet, the damage is not done. 2 million Pennsylvanians are out of work. Thousands more have had their paychecks cut. Some businesses have already closed permanently. Many more businesses are on the brink of closing.

The economic tragedy is reason enough to reopen. But, after nine weeks, we are now learning from doctors across our state and nation—including UPMC and CHOP Philadelphia—that the protracted shelter in place orders may not be medically necessary and are causing emotional and psychological harm—and, may lead to other medical illnesses, maybe even death.
As you may know, Chester County has had the lowest unemployment rate in our state for some time. But, even our relatively strong, diverse economy has been greatly harmed. In April, more people applied for unemployment in our County than in the prior 15 months combined. Thousands more have been subjected to rolling furloughs, reduced hours and reduced pay. Many churches and YMCAs now serve as food distribution centers.

Our County not only has had relatively few incidents, but our hospitals are more than prepared for any spikes. Our Commissioners have purchased 3.5 million masks and 40,000 test kits; and worked with our Chamber and other Chambers and civic leaders to create a Recovery Task Force. Its time to Re-Open PA, especially here in Chester County.

We have already prepared webpages with both CDC and our state’s Department of Health guidelines. We have dozens of providers of PPE ready to assist our businesses. We have joined with the Pennsylvania Chamber in hosting webinars to train our businesses to reopen safely.

Moreover, we believe that many businesses should be allowed to reopen immediately—regardless of any “color designation.” These would include micro-businesses, all retailers who can provide curbside pickup, historical sites and museums, and outdoor dining.

Respectfully, we must point out that your colleagues are looking at similar data—be it health or economic—and are moving faster and with purpose. From Florida to Ohio, states along the east coast and our region are outpacing us. We now fear that this will lead to more economic damage as our businesses, who are suppliers, will lose their place in the supply chain. This could cause a second wave of economic hardship.

Governor, we rallied to the cause. Together, we avoided the worst. To avoid the effects of the shutdown outpacing the effects of the virus, we need to re-open Pennsylvania. Together, it is time we mourn those who have died. Comfort those who have lost loved ones. Care for those afflicted. And, yes; it is also time to re-open.

Our Chamber urges you to immediately begin to re-open Chester County and move rural Pennsylvania to “Green.” We stand ready to partner with you and your administration to educate, train and assist our business and consumers. You trusted us to work responsibly to fight the virus. Trust us now to work responsibly to get our economy moving. It is time to re-open and restart our economy and our society. Our quality of life depends on it.

Respectfully,

/s/
Guy Ciarrocchi
President & CEO
On behalf of the Chester County Chamber of Business & Industry

cc: Chester County legislative delegation & County Commissioners