

March 16, 2020

Dear Honorable Senator Collins:

We are hospitality business owners and supporting suppliers, both for-profit and non-profit, in Maine and we are writing with urgency regarding the COVID19 outbreak and its economic impact on our businesses. We ask that you look to support small business owners, especially those in the tourism industry, during this immediate challenge.

The spread of the virus, and the subsequent directives for social distance and quarantine, is causing widespread event cancellations, hitting the travel and tourism industry hard. Since the virus outbreak began to escalate in the United States, our businesses have lost thousands of room nights and advanced room reservations and thousands of restaurant reservations and many more walk-in customers in just a few short weeks. These cancellations are immediate and will not return. Our businesses simply cannot sell yesterday's hotel rooms or restaurant meals today or tomorrow.

It is crucial that any lifeline provided to small businesses address this immediate and severe reduction in demand. With the precipitous drop in reservations, hotels and restaurants around the state of Maine are under immediate financial pressure. We know that COVID19 is a virus and that it will pass. What is not known is how long that will take and what the extent of the damage to Maine's tourism industry will be. In what should have been a celebration year to share Maine's Bicentennial with the world, this Spring will bring a devastating drop in sales, already down tremendously in just a few short weeks. Assistance must be immediate and must be workable. Assistance must address a temporary crisis and not be allowed to cause permanent damage to Maine's important small businesses with overreaching and complicated requirements as some have proposed.

Maine's tourism industry is critical – Our industry contributes at least \$6.2 billion in tourism expenditures, brings 37 million visitors to the state per year, sustains 110,000 jobs and contributes \$610 million in taxes. This is accomplished through the hard work of small business owners and their remarkable hospitality teams each year.

The Collins proposal would provide emergency cash-flow to employers so long as they agree to pay their workers whether they shut-down and lay-off their workers or remain open. We appreciate your understanding that our businesses should not be forced to permanently close because of an unforeseen, world-wide pandemic we have played no role in causing. You are also right to focus on protecting the jobs of our workers - we cannot run our businesses without them. Finally, we deeply appreciate your understanding that our businesses cannot take on substantial, permanent debt when revenues are plunging. Your proposal to forgive cash-flow assistance we use to stay in business, preserve jobs, and pay our employees would allow us to reopen, fully-staffed and ready to serve the public the moment this crisis passes.

Please act now to support Maine's small businesses and tourism during the immediate crisis with a responsible solution that does not further burden and shutter the welcoming restaurants, hotels and inns of our great state.

Thank you for your dedication to and of support Maine.