

Good afternoon, thank you for your time.

I am Amy LaBelle, and I, along with my husband own LaBelle Winery in Amherst, NH, with a restaurant, winery, tasting room, and event center. In preparing these comments, I have consulted with many event venue owners including Flag Hill Winery, Distillery and Event Center, Zorvino Vineyards and Event Center, and the NH Coalition of Event and Wedding Vendors through Hillary Gallager, which represents roughly 400 small businesses in New Hampshire who rely on the event industry for their livelihood. There are almost 300 event venues in New Hampshire.

Last year, LaBelle Winery hosted 330 events, including 80 weddings. These events pay our mortgage. Last year, our events business accounted for \$3.5 million in revenue. This year, we project we will be lucky to see \$1 million. The real trouble in that is not a loss of profit, but, rather, that we have built a business debt load that the events business we built could carry. Without these events, we cannot pay our mortgages and other business debt, which will cause the ancillary businesses — the winery, restaurant, retail, and tasting room - to fail.

I have spent two decades building a responsible business that actually works — and works to provide 120 excellent jobs with great health and other benefits for the people in my community. We had quite a nice “rainy day” fund saved. But, we spent that “rainy day fund” weeks ago on payroll to keep our team employed and to pay health care benefits for the 90+ people that I furloughed, so they wouldn’t lose their health care. It seems no amount of healthy business practices or conservatism could have predicted or could outlast the State’s response to this pandemic.

Family businesses are failing quite rapidly, actually. Action must be taken quickly, or we will live in a state in which only Walmart, Target and chain restaurants have survived. I don’t want to live in a place like that. Main Street is failing, and cannot sustain this hit. And, if my business fails, so will the many farms, vendors, and suppliers who rely upon our business to thrive.

Last Friday, I drove by the Amherst, NH Walmart and there were at least 1000 cars in the parking lot. With respect, what would be different about allowing me to host an event with proper safety guidelines in place?

Event venues must be considered differently from restaurants. We do not take the effects of COVID-19 lightly and want to assure the safety of our staff and employees by adhering to the guidelines set forth. We are ready to re-open our businesses and are able to follow the guidelines already approved for Restaurants & Food Service.

Please consider the following thoughts focused on event venues:

1. Restaurants and event venues are used to providing clean, sanitary and safe environments. This is what we do. We are already well-versed in food and health and safety requirements and regulations. We are a highly regulated industry. Indeed, keeping the public safe is in our DNA.

2. We propose gathering limitations be based upon 6 foot table distancing guidelines, just like the restaurant industry is doing. Much like how restaurants are able to flex open by adding tents and outdoor seating in parking spaces close to entrances, sidewalks, existing patios and lawn areas, we will also be able to follow the guidelines to do the same for our venues. To that end, consider announcing 6 foot table spacing requirements to which an event venue may adhere using best practices and taking into account their own particular situations and square footage. We will make good decisions that make the public comfortable no matter what, because it's in our own best interest to do so. Please do not pick an arbitrary number that does not take into account the square footage or layout of a venue. Rather, please announce requirements and allow venues to implement them safely in their own space.
3. Please consider allowing outdoor events immediately for any number of guests, so long as distancing guidelines are met. Respectfully, there is no difference between outdoor restaurant dining and outdoor event dining. It's the same thing. Why take away a bride's ability to enjoy her wedding day entirely? If a family is able to be socially distant but together to celebrate these important milestones, we can find a way to make it happen in a safe, responsible way that is entirely sensitive to the situation and in complete compliance with distancing and safety guidelines.
4. Absent clear guidelines, brides are cancelling at alarming rates. Please announce the parameters of Phase 2 and 3 as soon as possible. Please consider offering timelines on phasing. We need to know when we can open and with dates and milestones announced. Event contracts are often booked years in advance and event guests need time to plan whether they are or are not able to host their events. Brides, for example, need 8 weeks before their event to send out invitations, book travel, and otherwise plan. We need to know what to tell our brides and grooms with June and July weddings and beyond. Absent clear guidelines, brides are cancelling at alarming rates for dates well into the summer and beyond. Allay the panic with clear information.
5. I'd like to highlight to you the idea of private and community events to be held outside this summer or inside with proper social distancing. May we offer outdoor movie nights? May we offer community BBQ's on our vast terrace overlooking the vineyard or other outdoor spaces? May we offer cocktail parties on the Vineyard Overlook? Wine tasting classes inside or outside? Culinary classes inside or outside? Allow us to use our big, creative brains to find a good way to handle this situation, generate revenue, and still maintain a safe environment and follow guidelines with the spacing of our own venues.
6. We are incentivized to protect our guests; it's what we already do. Our guests will self select — if they are not comfortable, they simply won't come.
7. Event venues support a huge list of other businesses. Bakeries, photographers, DJ's, musicians, caterers, speciality clothing retailers, salons for hair and makeup, shoe

stores, beverage services, planners, videographers, live entertainment, photo booths, florists, officiants, lighting designers, decor and rentals and the list goes on. These business types do not require the need for hands-on interaction or require limited social interaction and therefore should be allowed to return to business while following already approved guidelines. Every single industry involved has had the rug pulled out from under them, and most of these business are small, family run businesses that will fail absent the opportunity to work.

In short, let us work, and let our employees work. They are suffering, as we are, many not having received an unemployment check even still! With guidelines in place, event venues can open safely. The urgency of this cannot be overstated. Every day that passes brings venues closer to bankruptcy, which will have lasting negative impacts to the fabric of our State and further increase unemployment numbers. Taking into account the loss of tax revenues to the State of hundreds of businesses in this industry, allowing venues to open responsibly and within guidelines is our only successful path forward.