



48 Grandview Road, Suite #2
Bow, NH 03304
603 225 9748
www.retailnh.com
shop@retailnh.com

NH Retail Association Requests Option for Retailers to Go to 100% Occupancy

The New Hampshire Retail Association requests the **option for retailers to go to 100% occupancy, while maintaining 6 feet social distancing.**

Depending on the store, some retailers feel they can safely invite customers into their stores at 100% occupancy, with distancing, while some are uncomfortable with that. The Association's position at this point is that the choice should be left up to the individual retailer. Some will continue at reduced occupancy.

Besides retail, the businesses that still have occupancy limits are businesses that people go to and stay a long time - think outdoor attractions, movie theaters, and the like. Customers come into retail stores and move along - they linger less and do not stay in one spot for extended periods. The social distancing requirement may still limit occupancy, but it won't be as restrictive as staying at the 50% figure.

These past six months have been challenging for bricks and mortar retailers, especially the smaller, main street shops and independent businesses. Many of these businesses had been doing minimal or no online selling but were compelled to pivot rapidly to set up their capability for remote sales and adjust marketing efforts including designing virtual events. And some still do not do online sales.

Online sales had been increasing steadily up until the pandemic. As it became clear the coronavirus was as dangerous as it is, the move to shopping online at the expense of brick and mortar stores accelerated at a pace that accomplished in several months what would have taken several years.

Yes, there are some retailers that are doing extremely well - garden centers, pool and patio stores, major retailers that were deemed essential and allowed to remain open and others. But this pandemic has been selective - there have been winners and losers in retail. For example, clothing stores have seen their sales plummet 80%. We hear from many smaller, family owned retailers who are doubtful that they can remain in business in the coming months.

With the holidays just around the corner, it is imperative that we allow more customers in our stores, while following health safety guidelines. Senator Carson commented that she heard from many constituents that during back to school shopping they were frustrated waiting in line to get into stores. Situations like that will drive even more shopping to online-only sales at the expense of bricks and mortar stores.

In anticipation of decreased holiday sales, you will see retailers starting the holiday selling season earlier to try to recoup some of their expected losses. We all should do what we can to encourage New Hampshire residents and out-of-state shoppers alike to shop at retailers who have made the investment in brick-and-mortar stores and customer-facing employees in New Hampshire. These businesses pay property taxes and New Hampshire business taxes, utilize New Hampshire vendors and participate in New Hampshire communities. The alternative is making it an easier decision to shop at online-only sellers like Amazon, Wayfair and the many product-specific online-only sellers.

With New Hampshire's positive COVID numbers still below .01%, and many of those positives involving institutions, we believe allowing retailers the option to increase their occupancy to 100% if they so choose is warranted and safe.

The National Retail Federation just released August retail sales. This illustrates how some categories of retailers are struggling, and some are doing well. In particular look at how online sales (at the expense of brick and mortar stores) are up 20.1% to last year.

- Clothing and clothing accessory stores were up 2.9 percent month-over-month seasonally adjusted but down 23.5 percent unadjusted year-over-year.
- Furniture and home furnishings stores were up 2.1 percent month-over-month seasonally adjusted and up 0.4 percent unadjusted year-over-year.
- Building materials and garden supply stores were up 2 percent month-over-month seasonally adjusted and up 11.9 percent unadjusted year-over-year.
- Electronics and appliance stores were up 0.8 percent month-over-month seasonally adjusted but down 3.4 percent unadjusted year-over-year.
- **Online and other non-store sales were unchanged month-over-month seasonally adjusted but up 20.1 percent unadjusted year-over-year.**
- Health and personal care stores were up 0.8 percent month-over-month seasonally adjusted and up 3.3 percent unadjusted year-over-year.
- General merchandise stores were down 0.4 percent month-over-month seasonally adjusted and down 0.2 percent unadjusted year-over-year.
- Sporting goods stores were down 5.7 percent month-over-month seasonally adjusted but up 8 percent unadjusted year-over-year.