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Rehoboth-Dewey Chamber of Commerce requests more help for businesses

Jul 29th, 2020 · by Matt Bittle · Comments: 0



Carol Everhart, president and CEO of the Rehoboth Beach – Dewey Beach Chamber of Commerce, is urging officials to provide help for businesses that are suffering because of the pandemic. (Special to the Delaware State News/Chuck Snyder)

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DOVER — The Rehoboth Beach – Dewey Beach Chamber of Commerce is urging officials to provide greater clarity and consistency to businesses during the pandemic and is calling for additional state aid. In a letter sent to Gov. John Carney Tuesday, chamber President and CEO Carol Everhart expressed concerns that a host of businesses will be forced to close unless steps are taken.

“For many of our seasonal businesses, the opportunity to generate enough summertime cash flow to make it through the winter months is quickly fading away,” she wrote. “For many businesses in the Delaware coastal communities, summer seasonal revenues in June, July, and August count for as much as 80% of their annual revenue.

“While June was better than expectations, the month’s positive sales trend was quickly erased in the first two weeks of July. ... The financial and economic fallout will be like nothing we have ever experienced before if our government officials do not provide some help or relief immediately.”

Revenues through the first half of 2020 are down in a major way, with losses between 35% and 50% for hotels compared to the first six months of 2019, according to the chamber. Restaurants have lost 75% of their income.

The group surveyed 76 of its 1,200 members, and just those 76 reported losing \$206 million from the same period last year.

Delaware has COVID-19 largely under control, Ms. Everhart said, noting hospitalizations and percentage of positive tests remain low. As of Tuesday, 68 people were hospitalized, down from a high of 337 in late April. The percentage of people testing positive has remained around 5% for the past month.

Delaware remains in a state of emergency, with limits on businesses like how many people can enter a store at one time. Face coverings and social distancing are mandatory when out in most public places.

Businesses are willing to take steps to keep customers safe and have appropriate precautions in place, Ms. Everhart said. She believes officials would be best served by allowing Delaware to move to the next phase in its reopening, which was initially slated for late June but has been on hold for the past month.

“With the more recent enforcement attempts designed to slow the spread of the virus, it is now obvious that the actual messaging being communicated by the State is a factor in this latest downturn. Many of the recent messages are unwelcoming and confusing to our residents and our visitors,” the letter to the governor states. “People believe our restaurants and bars are closed and that masks are required at all times, even while on the beach or while seated at tables.

“We feel that it is necessary for a more clearly stated series of messages touting the success of our plan to keep residents, visitors and staff safe while still providing a healthy, vibrant resort area be released. It is critical that this messaging come from our government leaders immediately.”

Ms. Everhart said Wednesday businesses should be given the chance to partner more with the state during the reopening process. Officials should concentrate on identifying and, if necessary, punishing outlets that do not comply with COVID regulations, she said.

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The business community is not denying the severity of coronavirus, Ms. Everhart said, but people are very concerned about their livelihoods. Absent a move to make the state more business-friendly, such as removing some restrictions or providing funding to companies, Delaware will see a very serious hit to its economy, she said.

“The effects of an economic collapse to the business community in Sussex County will be felt across the entire State,” the letter states. “Tourism is one of Delaware’s strongest business sectors. Negative revenue trends in the restaurant, retail and lodging industries in particular have far-reaching consequences across the First State.

“We must do all we can, together, to avoid such an outcome. We ask that you direct key staff members to communicate that our businesses are open, adhering to the standards of responsible social distancing, sanitization and the wearing of masks. We want to be part of a safe and prosperous solution that gives our struggling business community the best chance to survive.”

Jonathan Starkey, a spokesman for Gov. Carney, said the governor is very aware of how businesses are suffering but remains concerned about the public health risks that would come with easing restrictions.


“The Governor understands the important role that restaurants and bars play in our economy, and that’s why we’ve worked hard to try to help them open safely. However, on a call with the White House and the nation’s governors earlier this week, Dr. Fauci reiterated what we’re seeing around the country,” Mr. Starkey wrote in an email, referencing White House COVID task force member Anthony Fauci.


“A lack of social distancing and mask-wearing in bars and restaurants, particularly in vacation destinations, have caused the virus to spread. As the Governor has said throughout this crisis, we can’t have a healthy economy without healthy communities. The best thing we can all do is commit to wearing masks in public places, socially distancing, washing our hands regularly and staying home if we’re sick.


“While our numbers have improved, we have not won this fight yet. The fastest way to get off the quarantine lists of other states is for Delawareans and Delaware businesses to lean in and drive down our numbers even further. If Delawareans see instances of non-compliance with COVID-19 guidelines, they should email the public health team at HSPcontact@delaware.gov.”


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