



Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce
香港總商會 1861

香港總商會
香港金鐘道統一中心廿二樓
Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce
22/F United Centre,
95 Queensway, Hong Kong
Tel (852) 2529 9229
Fax (852) 2527 9843
Email chamber@chamber.org.hk
www.chamber.org.hk

Helping Business since 1861

3 February 2021

The Honourable Mathew Cheung Kin-chung, GBM, GBS, JP
Chief Secretary for Administration
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
25/F, Central Government Offices
2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar
Hong Kong

By post and email

Dear Chief Secretary,

The continued enforcement of restrictive measures to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus in Hong Kong has come at a heavy economic cost with certain sectors assuming a disproportionate share of such a toll.

The food and beverage (F&B) industry has been hardest hit because of the ongoing restrictions on the number of diners per table, as well as the ban on dine-in services after 6pm. These measures have had serious knock-on effects on businesses, including those along the F&B supply chain, with many struggling to stay afloat. This has been exacerbated by insufficient relief on rents with many landlords holding steadfast to existing tenancy agreements based on the presumption that restrictions on the F&B industry are of a temporary nature. Extending trade hours and employment subsidies therefore remain the industry's vital lifeline to protect livelihoods.

We share the Government's concern over the need to protect public health but believe a more balanced approach could be adopted without resorting to piecemeal and haphazard policies that come at the expense of regular commercial activities. The current response of shutting down entire industries due to isolated cases is not only harmful and excessive but could have unintended consequences that ripple across other parts of the economy.

It bears noting that there have been no major outbreaks during the past two waves despite catering premises remaining opened during the day. This is due to the industry's implementation and enforcement of preventive measures to contain the coronavirus. This, in itself, should provide compelling reason for the Government to ease current evening restrictions and make appropriate adjustments to operating hours for the respective categories of F&B businesses.

.../-2

Ultimately, a coherent and systematic approach should be put in place so that operators are able to understand their obligations and the implications of non-compliance. In addition to promoting consistency, and bolstering health and sanitation standards, the introduction of such a set of standards should also help restore public confidence.

With that in mind, we suggest that the Government give serious consideration to the following:

- Establish a confidence-building system by requiring a health certificate as a precondition for all restaurants to stay open until 10pm and bars/clubs/karaokes to operate from 9:00 pm to 2:00 am. To that end, we suggest that such a certification system be based on the HKQAA's Anti-Epidemic Hygiene Measures Certification Scheme. In addition, we suggest that venues with more than 3 confirmed cases be subject to a 14-day closure and sanitation requirement.
- Mandate the use of the "LeaveHomeSafe" app as a condition for remaining open past 6pm. Consideration could be also given to expanding the app's capabilities to facilitate establishments' ability to verify that guests seated together are from the same household and therefore of a lower risk profile.
- Emulate the UK's requirement that alcoholic beverages must be served at tables and can only be consumed when seated. This would be conducive to addressing concerns over crowding around bars.
- With no reprieve in sight and the Chief Executive's announcement on 1 February to extend existing restrictions on public gatherings, many businesses will not be able to survive beyond the Lunar New Year. Further government aid is therefore necessary to stave off the spate of business closures and job losses that would otherwise occur. Consideration could be given to a modified Employment Support Scheme (ESS) for affected industries whereby the Government subsidizes salaries for employees put on no pay leave by up to \$9,000 or 50% of pay, whichever is lower. This would help protect jobs and allow employers to maintain existing payrolls without requiring a sizeable financial commitment from the Government.

Yours sincerely



George Leung
CEO