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Good evening, Gov. Dunleavy and Honorable Members of the 31st Alaska Legislature:

I represent the incredible hospitality industry of Alaska that now – more than ever – needs your support. The impacts of COVID-19 have reverberated throughout the country, with few industries being hit harder than tourism and hospitality. Alaskan businesses – particularly smaller ones – have already felt the impacts. These are the places you celebrate your birthdays, sports victories, marriages, anniversaries, and even just the places you go to get away from the stresses of life. They are the heart of every community across our great state and right now, many are struggling to survive.

Businesses in every one of your districts have been damaged: travelers from Asia make up a large percentage of our winter tourism, particularly in the interior, which came to a halt weeks ago; music and event cancellations are cutting expected revenues from venues, caterers, and surrounding businesses; and cruise cancellations for 60+ days will have an enormous impact on coastal communities. In response to plummeting oil prices before the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in Alaska, oil companies were already cancelling dinners and other many high-dollar events that bring revenue to Alaska hospitality.

This will inevitably be one the worst Alaska tourism seasons in decades, which will be detrimental to our state, as only oil brings more dollars into Alaska each year. I expect that a number of Alaskan

businesses will not recover from this.

I implore you to support the Alaska hospitality industry when it needs you the most. You have likely heard that other states – California, Ohio, and Illinois – have mandated closures of on-premises eating and drinking at public establishments as the world navigates this pandemic. My request is that you not implement or push for similar statewide closures; the impacts to Alaska’s second-largest industry would be insurmountable. Not only would those businesses suffer, but tens of thousands of workers will be without jobs, many Alaskans will be without places to find food, and grocers and retailers will lose substantial revenue from sales to restaurants and bars.

Fear is driving people to stay home. Please remember, however, that Alaska restaurants are on the forefront of sanitation and best practices as they are regulated by the health department every day of the year, not just during a crisis. Alaska CHARR has been working closely with our members, the National Restaurant Association, and the Center for Disease Control to produce effective recommendations for our on-premises locations. Many establishments are already deploying even more rigorous practices because that is what they do – keep people safe and comfortable. Some self-imposed precautionary measures include:

- Large gatherings and events have been cancelled
- Restaurants have reduced seating by ~50% in order to move tables apart to provide a 6-foot buffer between guests
- Sanitation measures have increased exponentially, particularly in high-traffic and high-use areas
- Delivery and pick-up options are being heavily promoted, along with gift cards

We all know that just as many political conversations take place in our local eating and drinking places as behind office doors. Please be sure to speak with your local restaurants, bars, and retail stores before making any decisions that could force those establishments to never reopen.

I sincerely hope that you will contact me with any questions, or to discuss potential alternative options if you believe additional safety measures need to be executed by our industry.

Thank you from me and the tens of thousands of Alaskans who make up your hospitality community.

Very respectfully,

Sarah Daulton Oates

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