

To Whom It May Concern,

I have been a member of the restaurant industry for over a decade. It is an industry that offers enjoyment, celebration, and escape to a large majority of people in the nation. Those of us who work in the industry do so because we love what we do. It can be precarious counting on tips to pay your bills, stressful knowing no matter how many years you work somewhere, your salary has a ceiling, and lacking standard benefits that most industries enjoy. Year after year, we continue to serve the public, and offer hospitality to those who come through our doors.

That being said, service industry workers have high rates of mental illness, trauma history, and substance abuse. The access to healthcare that many of us have more recently been able to receive is invaluable. With no one paying into these plans, access will be lost. Necessary counseling and medication will be skipped. This is not even to mention that a large number of our population will not have access to care for COVID-19, the entire cause of our closures.

In addition, many of us live paycheck to paycheck. With the cities high rent, the ability to save money rarely exists. Without this safety net, the option of COBRA is unrealistic. Many fear they won't be able to pay for rent or utilities. Even with an eviction freeze for the month of April, and 6 months to pay that month back, it is unlikely we will have money for rent in May, assuming that that the shutdown won't be extended further. Six months is not enough time to pay back the missed rent, as we will continue to struggle to catch up on all of the other bills that stacked up while we were unemployed.

While I know a good majority of restaurant owners care very much about the wellbeing of their employees, restaurants run on famously thin margins. Putting more onus on owners to take care of the employees they were forced to temporarily let go will just result in the end of small businesses. I agree that large corporations should be doing everything that can, including continuing health insurance, and potentially pay. The reality of small businesses is that they will all end up closing shop without the help to offer employees these benefits. Even if the responsibility isn't put on them, many of our restaurants and bars are going to need help to weather this storm. If there is a large permanent shutdown, many of us will be unemployed far after this crisis is over.

I implore you to do everything you can to keep the heart of Portland alive. Please take care of our service industry workers.

Sincerely,

Jenn McDermott
FOH Manager

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