

Testimony in favor of LC 10

President Courtney, speaker Kotek and committee members,

My name is Matt Gumm, I am a bartender here in Portland, Oregon and I am reaching out to you today to ask for help. As a bartender, these shutdowns have put an incredible strain on me. I was let go from the best paying bar job I have ever had back in March, where I was able to begin receiving benefits including health insurance. Since the owners were not able to hire everyone back upon reopening, I had to accept a part time job at a much slower bar in a different part of the city where up until Wednesday the 17th I was only scheduled for two, six hour shifts a week. I am thankful that I was able to find employment with an owner and a team who seemed to be taking this pandemic seriously however due to limited operating hours and capacity none of us were making anything close to the money we have become accustomed to making as bartenders. To add insult to injury prior to the shut down I was starting a part time position with a liquor brand which had the potential to lead to a job that I have been working hard to obtain for the past two years. However, due in part to the pandemic, and the fact that social gatherings and indoor dining were so limited, this position has all but been eliminated. I have effectively lost three jobs in a matter of seven months due to circumstances that are completely out of my control. This has not only caused me financial distress but it has caused me to consider leaving the only industry I have ever genuinely enjoyed working in, and at thirty-five the prospect of having to go back to school or start from the bottom in a new field is equally painful as it is depressing. I live in North Portland along with my partner and our roommate both of whom make their living in the service industry as bartenders. Thankfully unemployment insurance has been able to supplement all of our income for now and our landlord has been understanding but eventually the unemployment will dry up and times may become significantly harder than they already are for all of us.

Somehow I feel even worse for the owners, managers and leadership of the eateries and watering holes across the state who have not only had to repeatedly lay off and rehire staff during this pandemic, but who have also exclusively footed the bill to make their establishments safe while COVID numbers continue to rise. From building additional seating to appropriately accommodate a profitable number of guests while being socially distant, building structures to comfortably seat customers dining outdoors while we experience the changing seasons, put barriers in place between employees and guests who are ordering, or paying, purchasing heating and cooling equipment, air circulators, additional cleaning products, masks, gloves, and many other odds and ends that none of these people could have possibly budgeted for or foreseen the need to budget for. Meanwhile these business owners are still having to pay rent, utilities, insurance and taxes along with the salaries for whatever workers they are able to afford to continue to employ. To put it bluntly this is a nightmare for all of us

I have worked in a number of industries throughout my career including shipping, manufacturing, technology, insurance, retail, and customer service, however working as a hospitality professional behind the bar is the only job that has brought me a modicum of happiness. I moved from Richmond, Virginia to Portland, Oregon to immerse myself in the wonderful food and beverage scene we have in our city and It gives me so much joy to do what I do, I take pride in being a great bartender in a city like Portland. A city whose identity is tied so inextricably to its bars and restaurants. I'm asking you to please vote in favor of LC 10, it will be a welcome first step in helping to save Oregon bars and restaurants. This is not only about saving people's businesses, it is about the folks who have sunk every dime they have into being their own boss, the folks that have spent a lifetime cultivating their craft, it's about saving people's livelihoods, income and everything that it provides for. Cocktails to go may not completely reverse the damage that COVID has done to our bar and restaurant industry but it will be another tool that we can use to help prop ourselves up until the federal government will do their jobs or at least until everyone can get vaccinated. I appreciate all of the work that you all have done during these difficult times, thank you.

--

Cheers!

Matt Gumm | He/Him


IG @mild.turkey