



Illinois General Assembly

Honorable Governor JB Pritzker
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

Governor Pritzker,

Children's museums across Illinois are facing an economic crisis right now. These facilities serve hundreds of communities and school districts, as well as millions of families. These museums are valued community resources, but they see no clear direction forward within the framework of the Restore Illinois guidelines from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. I believe that this is an oversight that needs to be corrected, and that state government needs to engage their industry to help plan for a safe reopening as COVID-19 rates improve in their Regions.

There are 17 children's museums and 10 science centers in the state, part of an industry that is known for safe and clean facilities. However, when the updated guidelines were released last summer, the museums found themselves among a minority of businesses strictly forbidden to operate. True to their missions of education and science, children's museums kept working by following the best practices provided by the Illinois Department of Public Health, the Centers for Disease Control and other experts, while working to develop inventive and safe ways to engage and educate children struggling at home with remote learning. These museums are good citizens and they believe in the science behind global health recommendations. Illinois should provide a clear path for them to reopen in the Restore Illinois plan.

Phase 4 guidelines now allow most indoor facilities to operate in some limited capacity. However, the guidelines for museums state that all hands-on exhibits and/or components of the exhibits must be closed. This means while most museums are allowed to reopen and begin to recover from a year-long closure, children's museums and science centers, which contain almost 100 percent "hands-on exhibits," will remain shuttered until Phase 5, which is when widespread vaccinations are in place and large gatherings are allowed once again.

At the same time, the Phase 4 guidelines for indoor recreation, including other similar high-touch activities for children and adults such as arcades, bowling alleys, gyms, gaming facilities, etc., are allowed to operate at 50% capacity or 50 customers with updated cleaning protocols in place. This policy does not seem consistent and could be seen as unfairly targeting museums which were widely recognized as industry leaders in cleaning protocols before the pandemic. Currently, there are children's museums open and operating in 23 other states, many of which have been open for six months or longer with no history of negative outcomes.

Even in states where children's museums are open, just as with restaurants and movie theaters, the public will not return to full visitation levels until vaccination rates are much higher. Museums are struggling and fighting right alongside small businesses across the spectrum in other states, but at least they can try to survive. In Illinois, that is not the case.

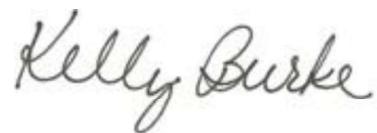
The economic impact of a year-long closure and limited relief funding for children's museums is expected to force many to close. The Association of Children's Museums predicts one third of their members won't survive this economic crisis, gutting a field of passionate advocates for children. Illinois students have had a rough year, from remote learning and the loss of valuable in-classroom time, to starts and stops with programs in and return-to-school efforts. Right now is exactly when they need every educational opportunity we can give them, including the unique and interactive environments provided by children's museums.

As former members of the Restore Illinois Collaborative Commission, we are joining together in bi-partisan fashion to call on your administration to assist the children's museums of Illinois and to offer them a path to reopen in Phase 4.

Sincerely,



State Senator Jason Barickman
Minority Caucus Chair
53rd District



State Representative Kelly Burke
36th District



State Senator Dave Koehler
Assistant Majority Leader
46th District

