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## Some Local Business Owners Say New Reopening Guidelines Don't Go Far Enough

Monday, August 31, 2020

By **Matt Hoffman**

PHOTO BY KPBS STAFF

Above: Thomas Hall, manager of The Grass Skirt restaurant, speaks during a news conference outside the county administration building near downtown, August 31, 2020.

Monday, San Diego County restaurants, gyms, salons and other businesses are allowed to reopen for indoor operations — with restrictions — but some business owners said they cannot survive on severely limited capacity.

"The announcement from the governor is not enough," San Diego County Supervisor Jim Desmond said. Desmond has been critical of the state's approach to slowing the virus' spread. He said the new guidelines show the state is "picking winners and losers."

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"The limitation on gyms of a 10% capacity and indoor dining at 25% is absurd," Desmond said.

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San Diego business owners said they cannot survive at those levels.

"Which nearly guarantees the failure of many small businesses in the coming months," Angie Weber of Cowboy Star Restaurant said.

Others who spoke at a news conference organized by Desmond Monday echoed those comments.

"Very few businesses can afford to survive at 25% maximum capacity — actually I don't know any, quite honestly," said Anthony Balistreri, owner of **The Godfather Restaurant**.

Balistreri said he has been following the constantly changing restaurant guidance, most recently moving tables outside, but he is questioning the guidance from health officials.

"We completely transformed outdoor space, meeting all physical distancing requirements, and quite frankly I don't know why because I don't think it's much safer outside than inside," he said.

One gym operator said reopening at 10% capacity is simply unrealistic.

"How am I supposed to bring staff back at 10% occupancy when I can't afford the electricity at 10% capacity?" said Scott Lutwak, CEO of Fit Athletic.

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Event planners are getting desperate.

"Our industry is dying," said Amy Ulkutekin, owner of First Comes Love & Catalyst Creative, which puts on weddings and other large events.

"We can contact trace, we can test prior to these gatherings and they're still not allowed," Ulkutekin said.

Some are worried about the impact layoffs are having on staff.

"When it comes to their mental health, it concerns me because they're at home all day, not doing what they love, which is serving people," said Thomas Hall, manager of The Grass Skirt restaurant. "They're making their money — Walmart, Target all these giant industries — but I can't open my restaurant and provide a living for my staff that need me."

While Desmond is calling for a full reopening of businesses, his colleague on the Board of Supervisors, Nathan Fletcher, said reopening indoor operations added with the unknowns of some schools restarting in-person classes is too much, too soon.

"Are we going to responsibly and safely manage our way through this? Not only in a way that not only protects people from the spread but protects our businesses from having to open and close repeatedly? And I think that the path we're on is not a wise one," Fletcher said.

Under the new guidelines, San Diego is in the "substantial" category for COVID-19 spread.