



## **NYC BID Association Statement on COVID-19 and Efforts to Save Our Commercial Corridors**

**March 19, 2020**

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic began spreading in New York City, the city's Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) were working intensely to educate, support, and advocate for 93,000 businesses, as well as countless residents and other stakeholders. The members of the New York City BID Association – the umbrella group representing all 76 BIDs in all five boroughs – have been on the ground, working to stabilize our neighborhoods and commercial corridors during this unparalleled health and economic crisis.

Our commitment to our businesses and members of our communities has never been stronger than it is now, and individual BID Directors and their staffs and work crews have undertaken some remarkable actions during these challenging days and will continue to do so going forward.

At the time when this city needs them the most, we have been providing essential services in our neighborhoods, including the sanitation services – including disinfecting street furniture, fixtures, and equipment – that are vitally important during a public health crisis. We have continued to operate, sanitize, and maintain 129 parks and public plazas. We have walked our streets, providing our businesses, workers, and residents with vital information and referring them to resources in an effort to keep their doors open. And we have performed these essential services without government funding.

Today, we add our voices to those of our governmental leaders and leading business advocacy and industry organizations, including the city's Five-Borough Chamber Alliance, the NYC Hospitality Alliance, the Real Estate Board of New York, and others who have suggested productive, creative, impactful ideas to keep businesses afloat and employees paid, and maintain the quality of life of this city, during the current crisis. Among our recommendations to strengthen the economy and protect workers are:

- **Tax Reforms and Payment Deferments**

When businesses are at their most threatened and commerce has slowed, government can and should react by modifying the tax structure. We join with New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli and the State Senate majority in calling for a deferral of the March 20 state income tax filing. Furthermore, the Commercial Rent Tax – unfair even in good economic times – should be repealed to help struggling businesses to stay open. We also believe that the city should provide local property tax relief to commercial property owners who forgive rent payments to struggling retail or hospitality industry tenants.

- **Regulatory Reform**

A health and economic crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for the reform of regulations that put small independent businesses at particular risk. We support the suspension of administrative fines, unless such violations pose an immediate risk to public or employee

health and safety, to be replaced by cure periods. At the minimum, there must be a moratorium on non-health related business violations and fines.

- **Suspension of Taxes and Fees**

State and local taxes and fees should be suspended or deferred without penalty until our business climate returns to normal. Businesses that are experiencing levels of commercial activity drop by 50-90% should not be expected to bear this excessive burden. As one example, the state has initiated sales tax holidays in past economic downturns to spur economic activity. The current crisis deserves at least the same consideration.

- **Business Assistance Programs**

While the city's initial offering of workforce retention grants and interest-free loans is commendable, we fear it will not be enough to meet the needs of the city's businesses. We encourage a much greater investment in loan and grant programs, with streamlined application and approval processes. We join with the Five-Borough Chamber Alliance in their call to: expand the no-interest loan program to include any small business (less than 100 employees) that has experienced a quarterly decline in revenue; increase the maximum loan amount to up to \$250,000; and create a targeted no-obligation grant program for businesses that are required to close as a result of COVID-19.

- **Moratorium on New Legislation**

At this time of great economic uncertainty, the worst thing for our businesses would be to add more uncertainty through new laws or regulations affecting New York City's business community. There should be a moratorium on new legislation that might increase cost burdens or regulations on small businesses until the COVID-19 pandemic has ended.

- **Expedited Payments to Organizations and Contractors**

We support efforts to streamline and provide a system for expedited payment vouchers for organizations and contractors which have active contracts with the State and City.

- **Government Financial Support for Paid Leave**

Government-mandated shutdowns of specific segments of our economy requires that government fund or help fund employee paid leave programs, including those in effect and those being considered.

With a protracted health crisis and resultant economic slowdown ahead for New Yorkers, we feel it is imperative to join with the state and city government to protect commerce and business development in the days, weeks, and months ahead of us.

The members of the New York City BID Association pledge to continue to work on the streets of our districts and do whatever we can to keep the city in business and we urge our government partners to listen to our policy recommendations and use us as a resource.

Together, we can make it through this – and be a stronger city.

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