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State of Montana Newsroom

Governor Gianforte Lifts Restrictions on Small Businesses With New Directive

Governor's Office
January 13 2021

HELENA, Mont. – Governor Greg Gianforte today issued a new directive to replace several complicated directives related to the pandemic.

“Improving our response to the pandemic has been my top priority,” Governor Gianforte said. “Today, I am issuing a new directive that removes or replaces the cumbersome layers of the existing ones. These new directives are clear. They are practical. They are commonsense. And they are easy to understand.”

Governor Gianforte’s 3-page directive replaces over 25 pages and layers of existing directives. Gianforte’s directive provides clear, easy-to-understand guidance.

The governor’s directive repeals onerous, arbitrary regulations on Montana small businesses, including restrictions on hours of operation and capacity.

Since March 2020, small business owners across Montana have worked to create a safe environment for their employees and customers while keeping their doors open. The new directive acknowledges the diversity of challenges businesses face in this pandemic, and affords them the flexibility to develop and implement appropriate policies based on industry best practices.

Governor Gianforte said, “We can reduce the burden on our small business owners while simultaneously protecting the health of Montana workers and customers. These are not mutually exclusive.”

Where industry best practices do not exist, the governor’s directive states that “such policies should be developed and implemented in accordance with federal, state, and local regulations and guidance.”

The directive also replaces the 25-person limit on public gatherings with simple guidance that “any public gatherings or events should be managed in a way that accommodates CDC social distancing guidelines.”

Montana business leaders welcomed Governor Gianforte’s new guidance:

> Todd O’Hair, president and CEO of the Montana Chamber of Commerce: “We know that the bar, restaurant, and hospitality industry has been hit particularly hard during this pandemic. By lifting the restrictions placed on indoor seating, removing limits on hours of operation, and eliminating capacity limits, these businesses will begin to operate normally again. Montanans will be back to work, and our economy will be one step further into recovery.”
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> Mary Jane Heisler, president of the Montana Tavern Association: “This is a big deal for taverns, restaurants, and other hospitality businesses. I appreciate Governor Gianforte’s decision to take a more thoughtful approach.”
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> Steve Wahrlich, board member of Montana Lodging and Hospitality: “The hospitality sector of Montana’s economy is greatly appreciative of Governor Gianforte’s actions today. His concise plan will help businesses move forward, while also working to protect our customers and workers. We think this is a step to starting off the new year in the right direction.”
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> Ronda Wiggers, state director of the National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB *)*: “We are very appreciative that Governor Gianforte understands that every small business is different. Allowing each business to follow best practice safety protocol that works for them, their employees, and their customers will allow Montana’s economy to begin to recover.”

In a press conference last Tuesday, Governor Gianforte provided a clear path to rescinding the statewide mask mandate. First, the most vulnerable Montanans are being vaccinated. Second, the legislature sends to his desk a measure to protect businesses and schools from lawsuits if they make a good faith effort to protect individuals from the spread of coronavirus and follow clear public health guidelines.

The full text of Governor Gianforte's Executive Order 2-2021 and directive implementing EO 2-2021 may be found HERE and HERE.

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ABOUT MONTANA

Population: 1,005,141

Nickname: Treasure State

State Capital: Helena

State Flower: Bitterroot

State Bird: Western Meadowlark

State Animal: Grizzly Bear

State Fish: Blackspotted Cutthroat Trout

State Gemstones: Sapphire & Agate

State Motto: Oro y Plata (Gold and Silver)