I testify today as an Oregon resident because I feel that I have a unique perspective that may help you in your decision to move this legislation forward. Due to my life experience, I can see both sides.

First, I have worked and managed retail business which would now considered as one of the essential businesses that have been able to remain open throughout this unfortunate situation.

Second, I have ran restaurants from delivery, to full service including a side bar area, to building, supplying, hiring and training over 100 people for a regional flagship location. I have more than 2 decades of experience managing these types of businesses with intimate knowledge of the cleanliness and cross contamination prevention standards and practices.

Third, which is the unique part, I have a medical condition of advanced stage COPD and considered in the extreme risk category during this virus. I am KEENELY aware of how this specific virus would overwhelm my already compromised breathing and could easily kill me if I were to contract COVID. Hopefully you can understand that my perspective comes WITH an actual personal fear and hyperawareness of the need for safety measures.

With these three points of personal experience to back it up, I believe that real science would show that restaurants and eateries are actually much safer than the already and consistently open retail locations. Cleanliness standards practiced every single minute of every hour of every day in restaurants even before this virus proliferation were beyond what is currently practiced in retail, save the six-foot distancing. Eateries with additional safeguards of distancing or installed barriers are places that I feel safe to visit with my dangerous medical condition. I do not feel safe visiting retail even though I must due to needs such as groceries where I can purchase produce that may have been handled by many other people that may be covid positive for all I know.

A common misconception is that eateries are not essential. When people understand that people such as the elderly rely on those prepared meals and services for daily existence, and that millions of our residents rely on those jobs, I'm sure that others would begin to realize how essential they really are.

With the loss of sales, the investments in trying to comply with new guidelines, and the inconsistent and constantly changing variables of the perishable stock needed, which has to be ordered far in advance of actual use, the economic impact to our eateries, as you have heard from various testimonies, is devastating…… I put this again so it can sink in to anyone that doesn't fully understand….. Places that are actually safer to be than where we are 'allowed' to go are DEVASTATED. In rural and frontier areas, these are likely the only eateries we have, now gone. This is especially seen in our local, small, resident-owned businesses with complete loss of income to the hundreds of thousands – if not millions – of employees that were not only able to pay their bills but became absolutely panicked as they were not able to even purchase food for their families to eat that I saw as they begged for us to help MONTHS after the promised unemployment still had not shown up.

In closing, this is not an issue of disbelief or disregard of health emergencies. It is an issue of recognizing practical application and real results. As someone that lives daily with the fear of the virus but yet knowledgeable of how these businesses run, I implore this committee and later the entire legislature to recognize that we have gone down a path that needs corrected immediately. Let's stop making our businesses close for good. Let's stop hurting our economy when they are not the places responsible for spreading this virus. Let's follow real science. Let's open up the places that have shown to be safer and follow guidelines. Let's be equitable across the board.

Shelia Megson
Resident of Oregon