

Businesses push for Murphy to lift COVID-19 capacity restrictions during business town hall

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Businesses across the state are looking for some relief when it comes to the current COVID-19 restrictions.

The New Jersey Business Coalition hosted a virtual town hall Thursday on responsible increasing of business capacity and what businesses need to survive. The more than hourlong event featured business owners discussing their concerns about continued pandemic restrictions.

Michele Siekerka, president and CEO of the New Jersey Business & Industry Association and a leader of the coalition, said that according to a recent survey, 85% of local businesses can't break even for a month at 50% capacity.

"Most need close to a 100% capacity to even turn a profit," Siekerka said.

Bob Wagner, head of Ott's Restaurant Group and vice chairman of the New Jersey Restaurant & Hospitality Association, said restaurants need seating.

"You can have indoor sports and can't have dinner in a restaurant," Wagner said. "It's ridiculous."

Joe Cleary, vice president and chief financial officer of Morey's Piers in Wildwood, called on state legislators to hold off on new laws that will lead to higher operating costs for struggling businesses.

"Don't do anything right now," Cleary said about any possible legislation that would lead to increased costs. "Over the last seven months, at a time when businesses are trying to survive, we are seeing an increase in new legislation that is increasing our businesses' expenses."

In June, Gov. Phil Murphy signed a bill mandating that all hotel rooms be cleaned every day. The law also requires hotels to provide guests with an adequate supply of sanitized linens, and to have at least one employee on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to answer any questions guests may have about health or safety.

Cleary said the law has led to an increase in costs during a time when revenue is down.

"Give us a little break," he said.