



September 18, 2020

Sandra Shewry, MPH, MSW
Acting Director
California Department of Public Health
Email: Sandra.Shewry@cdph.ca.gov

Erica Pan, MD, MPH
California State Epidemiologist
Acting California Public Health Officer
California Department of Public Health
Email: Erica.Pan@cdph.ca.gov

Re: Proposal for Convention Centers Safe Reopening Plan and Minimum Standards

Dear Ms. Shewry and Dr. Pan,

The California Travel Association (CalTravel) and a coalition of convention centers and destination marketing organizations thank you for your leadership in charting a reopening plan that prioritizes public health and safety. We would like to take the opportunity to voice our concerns regarding the lack of direction being provided to convention centers and business meetings while other sectors are being given clarity on reopening guidelines and procedures.

We have been in communication with the Governor's Office for several months and in June proposed a comprehensive plan and model for reopening business meetings, including conventions and trade shows. This plan prioritizes safeguarding the health of workers, residents, and customers, and will prevent a resurgence of infections. We have been working with our local public health departments to ensure measurable standards that address both public health and safety and have received preliminary feedback from our public health officers and the administration that our plan is strong. While we have been told that the standards we proposed are under your department's consideration, we urge your expeditious review so we can preserve our increasingly diminishing bookings, and the jobs and business that are rapidly disappearing as a result.

We understand the perception that business meetings could represent a higher public health risk than opening local businesses to local residents, since they promote gathering in one location and draw people from various geographic locations. However, we believe that they are distinctly different and present much more controllable environments than other mass public gatherings. Convention centers and other large meeting venues provide closed, controllable settings, where we have a high level of discretion over who is invited to participate (and therefore greater potential for contact tracing), how the space is configured for physical

distancing and flow, staff training, preparation and serving of food and beverage, configuration of bathroom facilities, crowd control, sanitation procedures, touchless transactions, and more.

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Global Biorisk Advisory Council® (GBAC), a Division of ISSA (the World Cleaning Industry Association) unveiled a new GBAC STAR facility accreditation program on cleaning, disinfection, and infectious disease prevention. This outbreak prevention, response, and recovery program establishes requirements to assist facilities with work practices, protocols, procedures, and systems to control risks associated with infectious agents. Our 13 largest convention centers in California have committed to certifying their facilities with this program. Globally, the number of GBAC accredited facilities now totals 139, and growing.

California's meetings, conventions, and trade shows provided \$128.2 billion in total business sales, \$5.2 billion in state and local taxes, and 783,000 jobs. However, the state will lose \$49.7 billion in direct spending this year with the cancellation of events in our convention centers, with cancellations extending well into spring 2021. For every month the meetings industry is paused in California, the economy will lose on average \$4.1 billion in spending. Not only that, once a recurring event moves its venue, it may take years, if ever, to bring that business back to California. Losing these signature conventions and meetings will dramatically reduce our state economy's prospects for recovery, jeopardize much-needed state and local tax revenues, sustain our high unemployment rate, and diminish the quality of life for residents

Meanwhile, as the uncertainty of California's timeline for reopening continues, other destinations such as Las Vegas, Indianapolis, and Orlando, are capturing California's market share and hosting large gatherings. Indianapolis hosted 40,000 people across 18 meetings in a 40-day timeframe, with 11 held in their convention center. Anecdotal evidence shows that COVID rates did not spike as a result of recent business meetings in Indiana and Orlando. With case rates stabilizing, Philadelphia recently announced a February 2021 target date for the return of large events.

Our sense of urgency for your clear direction comes not only as we continue losing business meetings and conventions to markets that are open, but due to the fact that events of this scope and scale take years to plan and execute. We urge you and the Governor to expedite the review and approval of our proposal for conventions to resume with modified operations and enhanced safety standards. We are doing everything we can to address the state's safety concerns for a safe and productive future together and look forward to your feedback on this plan.

Sincerely,

California Travel Association