

The Connecticut General Assembly



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State Rep. Turco, Senator Lesser, DECD Deputy Commissioner Thames Host Newington Business Community Discussion

NEWINGTON — **State Representative Gary Turco** (D – Newington), **State Senator Matt Lesser** (D – Middletown) and **Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development Deputy Commissioner Glendowlyn Thames** met with local business owners Thursday, August 20, in the Newington municipal Constitution Square Parking Lot to discuss measures they can take amid the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic to protect employees and customers, reduce the spread of the virus, and answer questions on the state's industry reopening guidelines and assistance programs available for businesses.

"I'm dedicated to keeping our local businesses open and providing the necessary resources and information to help out owners. These establishments are an integral piece of our community's fabric and make Newington a unique place to live and visit," said **Rep. Turco**. "During Thursday's event, we had a constructive conversation on how we can help our small businesses weather this pandemic and thrive in the months to come. I was grateful Senator Lesser and Deputy Commissioner Thames were there to lend their support and expertise."

Meeting with Newington business owners, the state officials discussed the advancement of the state's reopening toward phase 3, which is contingent upon continuous low infection rates. While the state remains in phase 2, phase 3 of Connecticut's Reopen Plan is expected to be announced in the coming weeks. Phase 3 would increase capacity limits of private gatherings and restaurants, and open bars. This phase has been delayed to further reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Businesses seeking to reopen under Phase 2 of the state's reopen plan must self-certify they are following the state's sector guidelines at <https://service.ct.gov/recovery>. The sector rules for each reopening phase are available on the DECD website, www.ct.gov/decd.

Since Governor Lamont signed the Stay Safe, Stay Home order in March, businesses have had to modify and adapt their business models to adhere to state reopening guidelines and minimize customer interaction. Restaurants have altered their service models to accommodate delivery and curbside pick-up whereas brick and mortar storefronts have had to develop a model that offers contactless assistance to consumers while remaining competitive against online retailers.

There are assistance programs available for businesses to access personal protective equipment and capital via grant and loan programs, and help employees, such as the High Extended Benefits program.

The High Extended Benefits program kicks in when Connecticut's unemployment rate averages 8 percent or higher for three consecutive months. It offers unemployment claimants an additional seven weeks for a total of 20 weeks of benefits and extends the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program for an additional seven weeks for a total of 46 weeks. Connecticut Department of Labor Commissioner Kurt Westby announced the start of this program on August 4. More information about this extended unemployment insurance program is available on the DOL website, www.ct.gov/dol.

Information about assistance programs for businesses is available on the DECD website, www.ct.gov/decd.

Business owners who were unable to attend the forum can reach out to **Rep. Turco** on his personal cell phone at 860-335-6122 or email him at Gary.Turco@cga.ct.gov for assistance and to have their questions answered.

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