

April 14, 2020



Dear Local Leader,

On behalf of retailers across the State, the North Carolina Retail Merchants Association (NCRMA) sincerely appreciates your tireless efforts to address the coronavirus pandemic in your communities.

NCRMA is working with our members to communicate the provisions of Executive Order 131. As you know, the order requires retailers to implement new maximum occupancy standards, marking of 6-foot distances in high-traffic areas and cleaning of high-touch areas. Having these provisions consistent statewide is of great importance allowing retailers to keep their primary focus on the health and safety of customers and employees while serving communities.

In addition, there were items included as recommendations in the Executive Order rather than requirements. This distinction came about after much discussion and policy considerations which are highlighted below. We understand that many of you may look to other jurisdictions or practices already implemented by specific retailers and consider whether these types of measures should be required for all retailers in your communities. Below are some of the policy considerations and real-world experiences from retail store operations illustrating why these measures should continue to be strongly encouraged throughout all of North Carolina but not required. Should you have questions or wish to discuss any of these issues or ideas we welcome the opportunity to do so with you.

One-Way Aisles: While some retailers have voluntarily put one-way aisles in place to improve social distancing, it has also been determined that customers spend a greater amount of time in the store as a result. Additionally, one-way aisles have also increased conflicts between customers where one customer goes slightly into a one-way aisle to grab an item near the end of the aisle rather than going down the next aisle and all the way back up the aisle to get the item. One-way aisles also do not work in certain retail segments like convenience stores, independent hardware stores or even near the produce aisle in a grocery store.

Plexiglass and acrylic shields at point-of-sale: Many retailers have voluntarily installed plexiglass and acrylic shields at the point-of-sale areas. This social distancing tool was not mandated because plexiglass and installers have become difficult to find with plexiglass on back-order for some retailers. Additionally, where a retailer may be predominately doing curbside pick-up (i.e. a bottle or wine shop) it is not practical to install plexiglass, and would increase demand for an item already in short supply making it more difficult for grocery and pharmacy retailers to obtain plexiglass where it is needed more.

Masks and Sanitizer: Health systems, first responders and retailers are all trying to obtain masks and hand sanitizer. When these items can be obtained, retailers are providing these safety products to their employees, but because these items are in such short supply it is not practical to mandate these items.

Special Hours for Senior/High-Risk Populations: Many retailers have implemented special hours for seniors and high-risk populations and in some cases for first responders. However, it is not practical to implement senior hours at a convenience store, a bottle shop or a phone store or to prescribe particular times or parameters around those hours as each store is customizing them to meet their customers and community as most appropriate.

I hope this serves as a helpful explanation as to why these items, which many businesses have already implemented, are included as recommendations but were not required. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andy Ellen".

Andy Ellen
President and General Counsel