

Senate Hearing 4/23/20

Hi, I'm Matt Stuckey, a third-generation car dealership operator from Hollidaysburg, PA. In 2009 at the age of 30, I took over daily operation of our company from my father. We reached our peak of employment just before the Coronavirus pandemic struck in March of this year at 240 full and part time employees. Thankfully, our county has been minimally impacted by the Coronavirus as of yet, but my heart goes out to our neighbors in other parts of the state who have borne the brunt of its wrath. My heart also goes out to all who have been affected by this virus' economic implications.

We put plans in place to play our part in limiting the spread of the Coronavirus. We knew that the need our business meets is essential. Our customers are doctors, nurses, police & first responders, municipal agencies, and countless others who rely on their cars and trucks to do their job day in and day out. My team worked feverishly to accelerate plans we already had in place for online sales transactions from the time the school closures and initial restrictions on businesses were announced until March 19th when the restrictions were increased and included a mandate to close the sales portion of our business. The bottom line is the sales part of my business that was deemed "non-life sustaining" and forced to close can (and now does) operate with the same mitigation efforts as the service part of our business that was deemed "life sustaining" and allowed to continue to operate the entire time.

Many other business categories were required to completely shutter or be limited in ways that significantly reduced their ability to function effectively, and I feel many of them were not thoroughly vetted before being required to close as well. We pursued relief through the waiver process, we applied 3 times, but did not get approval. Approximately 20 other car dealerships throughout the state were granted a waiver to continue sales – how could someone at DCED have allowed inconsistency within an industry? Worse yet, several dozen of our customers left the state of Pennsylvania to purchase a car in Maryland and other surrounding states, their need for a car drove them out of state during a "stay at home" order!

Pennsylvania became the epicenter of unemployment claims - we tallied the highest number of unemployment claims per capita for the weeks following the March 19th announcement. New York initially made a similar decision to force dealerships to stop selling cars on March 20th, but they put in a policy similar to PA's just announced "internet sales" policy on March 26th – making PA the only state in the region to not allow sales – our restriction was not released until just this past Monday – April 20th. This restriction coupled with the forced closures of other industries obviously drives our extraordinarily high percentage of unemployed workers relative to the states in our region.

My hope in speaking with your committees today is to share the frustration I've had with the economic implications of the response to the Coronavirus, and to start a plan of how we would better deal with a similar situation should it happen again in the future. My goal is to prepare my company and our industry to meet a necessary demand to repair AND sell vehicles if a similar situation arises again. We are directly linked to the front lines of our health care, public safety, food chain and many other essential workers and we need to be able to serve them so they can serve all of us. Thank you for your time today.