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MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Governor Gretchen Whitmer
Capitol Building
Lansing, Michigan

Dear Governor Whitmer,

Thank you for your attention to this letter as it is a deep concern that I am asking you to consider.

I appreciate your attention to details as we, together, deepen into the Covid 19 situation that has gripped our world. I want to specifically discuss the determination of garden centers/greenhouses as essential services.

I have shared my concerns with MDARD and while they stated that they shared the information with your office, this is the reply I received on my inquiry:

Regarding curbside - "No person or entity shall operate a business or conduct operations except to the extent that its workers are necessary to sustain and protect life, regardless of whether the business or operation is open to members of the public." The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has deemed nurseries and greenhouses to be essential to the point of growing plants, however the sale of plants to public is not allowed. If selling wholesale this is permissible.

There is a tremendous difference between most Michigan greenhouses and a garden center. Michigan greenhouses are third in the nation in garden tray production and supply most all vegetable/flower trays to the rest of the country. They supply the big box stores and garden centers. Most Michigan greenhouses are wholesale in nature. Greenhouses are considered agriculture operations as they grow plants in soil.

I understand greenhouses are allowed to maintain (safe distance) employees to keep plants alive and sell wholesale. According to MDARD response - Greenhouses are allowed to wholesale to garden centers, but garden centers are not allowed to sell to the public. This point needs clarification as it has caused an unfair and unequitable situation for Michigan businesses and the public's inability to purchase starter plants to grow their food. Through calls made yesterday I discovered that big box stores (Menards, Lowes, Home Depot, Kroger, Meijer, etc.) are still selling plants and their garden centers are

open. These are heavy trafficked areas and social distancing is not always maintained. Yet our Michigan garden centers are not allowed to sell the very same items. We need one clear policy for the entire state.

With the growing demand for food as folks are homebound, so is the demand to grow food at one's home. Seeds are already nearly impossible to purchase and residents are contacting me asking where they can acquire plants for gardening. They need to be able to purchase from garden centers. I believe garden centers can set up a system where they can take phone or internet orders – pull the order and place on a table for curbside pickup. This would be no different than order from a restaurant menu and going to pick up your food. I firmly believe this system could and should be allowed for the benefit of our citizens and businesses.

Please consider this request to review and adjust the greenhouses and garden centers as essential services. Time is of the essence! Plants and Flowers will lose all of their value as they outgrow their containers and become useless! Most garden centers business is in April, May and the beginning of June. Michigan is number one in the sale of Easter Lilies and our greenhouses are loaded to capacity of Easter Lilies.

Other states around us such as Ohio and Illinois have made the decision that garden centers are essential and have allowed them to service residents gardening needs. In New York State, one of the hardest hit in this crisis, they specifically spell out care and sales of plants as essential:

Horticultural Operations: For purposes of Executive Order 202.6/PAUSE Executive Order, "Essential Business" states "agriculture/farms," which includes the horticulture industry. As outlined in Agriculture and Markets Law Article 25-AA Section 301, horticulture is a key component of agriculture and New York State farms.

For horticultural operations, the Department defines the following businesses/activities as consistent with Executive Order 202.6:

- Production, movement, maintenance, and sale of vegetable plants, nursery stock, trees, plants, and flowers at greenhouse and nursery operations.
- Tree and shrub trimming and removal for disease, safety, and public health purposes.
- The placement and ground maintenance of sod, landscaping plants, flowers, ornamentals, and trees on residential and commercial grounds.
- Transportation necessary to meet any of the above functions.

<https://agriculture.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2020/03/guidanceforthehorticultureindustry.pdf>

North Carolina also considers garden centers essential: Agriculture workers supporting the green industry to include nursery operations, garden centers, landscape and maintenance companies critical to the environmental and physical living conditions necessary in our communities

<http://www.ncagr.gov/disaster/documents/COVID-19.htm>

Garden Centers:

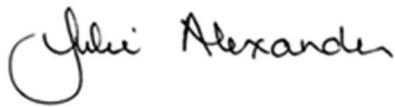
If you choose to continue to provide these garden center services, please follow these BMP's (Best Management Practices) along with any other procedures you have put in place:

- Consider offering online shopping, call ahead orders, curbside pickup or delivery as available

- Limit the number of customers near the cash registers and in the store at any given time. Many retailers are marking the floor in check-out lines to encourage social distancing.
- Sanitize all carts, baskets, door handles throughout the day as well as the credit card pads and door handles.
- Staff members will be required to sanitize regularly
- Have hand sanitizer available at the checkout.
- Social distancing between staff and customers is required in the store, grounds and greenhouses
- We respectfully ask any individual exhibiting even minor symptoms to stay home.
- Permit phone orders
- Drive up service

With deep concern for our Michigan citizens and businesses, I ask that you consider my request to deem garden centers and greenhouses essential services and allow them to serve our citizens. I am available for discussion at any time and appreciate your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Alexander". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "A".

Julie Alexander, District 64
House Agriculture Committee, Chair