

12TH DISTRICT
STATE SENATOR
MARIA COLLETT

SENATE BOX 203012
THE STATE CAPITOL
HARRISBURG, PA 17120-3012
717-787-6599
FAX: 717-783-7328

GWYNEDD CORPORATE CENTER
1180 WELSH ROAD
SUITE 130
NORTH WALES, PA 19454
717-576-5983



Senate of Pennsylvania

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EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

EMAIL: senatorcollett@pasenate.com
WEBSITE: www.senatorcollett.com
FACEBOOK: facebook.com/senatorcollett
TWITTER: @senatorcollett
INSTAGRAM: @senatorcollett

April 2, 2020

Secretary Dennis Davin
Department of Community and Economic Development
Commonwealth Keystone Building
400 North Street, 4th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0225

RE: Re-Designation of Outdoor Nurseries and Garden Centers

Dear Secretary Davin:

On behalf of the locally-owned outdoor nurseries and garden centers in my district and around the Commonwealth, I ask that you reconsider the categorization of these businesses as non-life sustaining.

An overwhelming majority of Pennsylvanians love to garden, a relaxing, healthful and solitary activity that is done at home. The next two months are peak gardening season and the peak sales months for local outdoor garden centers.

Related businesses such as "forest nurseries," "greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture production," and "services to buildings and dwellings...including landscaping services" have all been deemed life-sustaining. Wholesalers are also deemed life-sustaining, and without their retail customers, their businesses are suffering too.

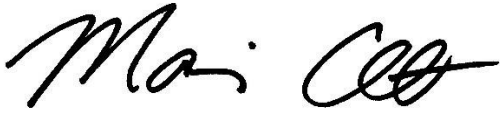
Meanwhile, large corporate chains like Lowe's, Home Depot, and Wal-Mart, by virtue of the fact that they also sell life-sustaining goods, are selling plants and garden supplies. These corporate chains, which do not even pay the same taxes that our Pennsylvania businesses do, are now monopolizing the industry with inferior products that are, quite frankly, sold in more cramped quarters, while small business owners suffer.

I emphasize the word "outdoor" because outdoor nurseries and garden centers are by design more capable of limiting contact between customers and enforcing social distancing. The types of products sold do not require bagging. There are no door handles to touch, or floors and restrooms to clean.

If it's a concern about close quarters, perhaps a limit on the number of people who can shop at one time based on the size of the outdoor retail space, say 1 customer per 50-100 square feet, could be implemented. Or centers could operate by appointment only.

Where the risk of virus spread is minimal and the physical and mental health benefits of gardening to isolated Pennsylvanians, as well as the benefit to Pennsylvania's seasonal small businesses, are immense, the decision to me seems clear. For these reasons, I respectfully ask that you change the designation of outdoor nurseries and garden centers to life sustaining.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maria Collett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Maria" and the last name "Collett" clearly distinguishable.

Senator Maria Collett