



nationwide marketing group

March 25, 2020

Office of Governor Ralph Northam
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Northam,

Virginia's independent furniture and bedding retailers are focused on the health, safety and sustainability of their employees, families, customers, and communities as the continued outbreak of COVID-19 develops. On behalf of the 38 independent furniture and bedding dealers who operate 52 storefronts in Virginia and are members of Nationwide Marketing Group, we're sincerely appreciative of the leadership, quick responses, and continually developing efforts your administration has shown as together, we work to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on both public health and the broad economic implications in Virginia.

The independent furniture and bedding retailers and servicers in Virginia are following the CDC's Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers and strive to do their part to help accomplish the goal of all Virginians in slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

Today, perhaps more than at any time in the past, Virginia families are counting on these retailers during this time of crisis, and the independent furniture and bedding retailers are committed to being there for their customers, their neighbors, and their communities. The current and unprecedented pandemic demands that all Virginians work together for the greater good, and these small businesses and their teams stand ready to do their part. We believe that independent furniture and bedding retail business owners are best equipped, best informed, and best able to determine their abilities to remain open and serving their communities.

As you're undoubtedly very deliberately considering which businesses are "essential" and "non-essential" retail for purposes of social distancing, it is critically important not to overlook the important role that Virginia's independent furniture and bedding retailers and servicers play in the safety of Virginia's residents and their households during this time of crisis.

It's crucial that furniture and bedding retailers and servicers remain open and serving their communities. It is our position that three primary factors completely validate essential status for these businesses. First, these dealers serve those who work from home with home office furniture necessary for them to efficiently do their work in relative comfort. Secondly, access to mobility-enabling furniture, such as power lift chairs, is vital to those who are mobility challenged and disabled. Finally, access to motorized adjustable (hospital bed) style bed foundations make possible the feeding, bathing and enablement of necessary bodily functions for those who are bed-ridden or disabled.

Today's industry data shows that a high percentage of purchases of the above items are made under duress for the replacement of products that have failed, or as the need for these products arise, often without expectation. Such failures and new needs occur daily, and as such, access to quality mobility



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enabling devices is vital. Additionally, the sudden surge in increased use by those sheltering in place will see a correlating spike in failures and the needed service or replacements that result.

The products offered by independent furniture and bedding dealers serve critical roles necessary to maintain safe home environments for those sheltering in place. Among the critical roles played by these products are:

- As employees are being required to work from home, their access to office furniture and accessories is essential for the successful implementation of government mandated work from home provisions.
- As access to care facilities for the elderly continues to become strained, more of those with limited mobility will be required to remain at home. Access to lift chairs is essential for their care givers who, themselves, may not have the physical ability to help and/or who need to limit their close exposure to the immobile.
- As those who are ill and/or immobile find themselves bed ridden and must be cared for in the home, access to motorized and adjustable “hospital type” bed frames are essential to make feeding, bathing and other bodily functions easier for family and caregivers to provide.

We urge you to clarify this in your statements to the public, and to clearly designate independent furniture and bedding retailers and servicers as essential in Virginia.

Finally, it is important to note that many stores operating in the independent furniture and bedding retail sector in Virginia are equipped to allow for contact-less, curbside pick-up or curbside deliveries. Further, the vast majority of Virginia’s independent furniture and bedding retailers have in place e-commerce solutions that allow consumers to select, purchase and request delivery or pickup of furniture and beddings through secure, transactional websites. These capabilities reduce the need to strain in-place social distancing measures in physical store locations, which are in place to serve those with no access or familiarity with shopping for such goods online.

Thank you for your attention to this concern and your ongoing leadership. Nationwide Marketing Group stands ready to assist in any way as you consider how to best safeguard our communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'THickman'.

Tom Hickman
President, Nationwide Marketing Group



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Dev Mukherjee
Executive Vice President, Nationwide Marketing Group

Frank Sandtner
Executive Vice President, Nationwide Marketing Group

cc: Matthew R. Sway, National Retail Federation, Brian Dodge, Retail Industry Leaders Association