



April 3, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence
The White House
Office of the Vice President
Washington, DC 20500

RE: CISA Memorandum on Identification of Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers During COVID-19 Response

Dear Mr. Vice President:

The health and safety of employees, customers and families is the top priority for the essential home furnishings industry. On behalf of the members of the American Home Furnishings Alliance, the Home Furnishings Association, and the International Home Furnishings Representatives Association we appreciate your leadership of the White House Coronavirus Taskforce. Furthermore, the swift efforts of President Trump to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, both in terms of public health as well as the broader economic implications across the nation, have been extraordinary.

Together, our organizations represent the \$114 billion residential home furnishings industry. Our members comprise the entire furniture supply chain from individual components all the way to the finished products that end up in a consumer's home. We are truly appreciative of the great work being done by the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency to provide uniform guidance to state and local governments through its March 19, 2020 and March 28, 2020, memorandums. Notwithstanding this excellent work, the essential operations of the home furnishings industry are not clearly identified and acknowledged in these memorandums. This oversight has led to confusion within our industry and has resulted in cease and desist orders in certain locales across the nation.

As a result of disparate and sometimes uncoordinated local government actions, an inadvertent monopoly has been created by acknowledging certain businesses as essential while ignoring other businesses that also play an essential role in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Big box stores and online retailers largely remain open, because they sell what are deemed to be essential items, such as over the counter medication, food, hardware, and appliances. However, these same retailers are not limited to only selling products deemed essential. Rather, they are selling and shipping home furnishings nationwide while pure-play home furnishings retailers are being cannibalized. This is resulting in dire business consequences and thousands of job losses.

Staying at home is essential to defeating COVID-19, and home furnishings are essential for staying at home.

- With little to no warning, Americans have been directed to stay indoors and work from home. Many find themselves in ill-equipped spaces that hamper their productivity. Furthermore, some companies may change their business model following the pandemic to enable employees to work partially or entirely from home on a permanent basis.

- With little to no warning, many families are attempting to home-school children and many of these households lack adequate furnishings to create basic workspaces.
- College students across America are now at home taking online classes due to the closure of hundreds of colleges and universities. Many of these students also need the opportunity to adequately furnish a basic workspace in order to have a productive learning environment.
- Families have more furnishings needs, both indoors and outdoors, as a result of the stay-at-home orders.
- Enabling families to meet their home furnishings needs while confined inside homes will make them more inclined to follow stay-at-home orders for work and leisure activities which will, in turn, help directly combat the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Stress caused by stay-at-home orders, home schooling children, job loss, economic uncertainty and separation from loved ones causes poor and inadequate sleep. Under the best circumstances, poor sleep leads to other health issues. Americans need the opportunity to improve their bedding, which can dramatically improve sleep quality, if they deem this necessary and beneficial.
- Quality sleep also improves Americans' ability to fight illness. Further, enhancements like power bases that allow the user to adjust their sleep surface are shown to lessen shortness of breath, help alleviate heart congestion and inflammation, increase blood flow and reduce snoring and sleep apnea.
- In homes where someone has already become ill, there may be a need for mattress and pillow protectors – items sold by mattress specialty stores – to provide a safe and hygienic place to rest.

On behalf of the nearly 1.5 million home furnishings-related employees nationwide, we respectfully request that the CISA guidance be updated to clearly acknowledge the essential nature of home furnishings retailers as well as the home furnishings supply chain that is necessary to meet product demand. We strongly encourage you to address this important issue directly with our nation's Governors who are implementing their own bespoke guidelines, which is creating substantial and unnecessary confusion for hardworking business owners. Without clear guidance and coordination between the states and the federal government, the American furniture industry is going to suffer irreparable damage. We need definitive action now to ensure the survival of this vital industry.

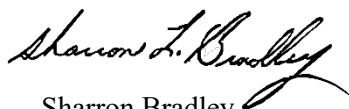
Our members are diligently investing millions of dollars and countless hours of effort into following CDC guidance to routinely clean and sanitize all their facilities without exception. We are also taking great pains to socially and physically distance people as has been recommended by the COVID-19 taskforce as well as taking all additional necessary precautions to ensure a safe environment for both our employees and customers.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns and for your ongoing leadership. The American Home Furnishings Alliance, the Home Furnishings Association, and the International Home Furnishings Representatives Association stand ready to assist as you consider how to best safeguard our communities.

Sincerely,



Andy S. Counts
Chief Executive Officer
American Home Furnishings Alliance



Sharron Bradley
Chief Executive Officer
Home Furnishings Association



Ray Allegrezza
Executive Director
IHFRA

CC:

Governor Larry Hogan, State of Maryland, Chair, Executive Committee, National Governors Association
Governor Andrew Cuomo, State of New York, Vice Chair, Executive Committee, National Governors Association