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NJGCA Calls on Governor Murphy to Temporarily Suspend Self-Serve Prohibition *Temporary Self-Service in New Jersey Will Reduce Spread of Coronavirus*

The New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience, Automotive Association (NJGCA) is the trade association representing the hundreds of independently owned motor fuel retailers across the state of New Jersey.

On March 9th, Governor Murphy declared a State of Emergency and Public Health Emergency in New Jersey to contain the spread of COVID-19. With over 16,000 cases in the state and the peak number possibly weeks away, the New Jersey gasoline retail industry is understandably anxious not only regarding the status of their businesses and if they will survive past the quarantine, but also with retaining employees and avoiding getting sick themselves among a fast-spreading virus pandemic.

The gasoline retail industry faces its own unique set of concerns amid the spread of the Coronavirus. New Jersey is currently the only state in the United States that does not permit any motorists to pump their own gasoline. Current guidelines in reducing the spread of the Coronavirus include minimizing physical contact. Because of the interaction with the customer and the exchange of cash or credit card back and forth, the customer and the gas attendant may be putting themselves at risk for contracting the Coronavirus. An attendant wearing gloves and never touching their face may be able to protect himself from any contamination on a sick motorist's credit/debit card, but the virus will presumably continue to live on the attendant's gloves and perhaps attach itself to the card of every subsequent motorist who comes in afterward.

Even the state of Oregon has recognized the need to suspend their ban on self-serve gasoline in the half of their state that did not permit motorists to pump their own gas. Oregon suspended their ban on Friday as more gas stations were unable to provide attendants willing to work the pumps, and more motorists refused to permit attendants to serve them.

Sal Risalvato, NJGCA Executive Director, surveyed his members on the issues they are currently facing with the Coronavirus and found the following:

- Employees that work as gas attendants do not feel safe having contact with customers who may be infected with Coronavirus since it is impossible to maintain the 6-foot distance required while interacting all day with motorists to conduct the fueling of their vehicle.
- Many motorists have the exact same concern as many of the attendants. They do not want to break the 6-foot social distancing guidelines by having contact or interaction with gas attendants. There have been many instances in which motorists have insisted on

pumping their own gas and have refused to allow attendants to even touch their credit cards.

- It is becoming more difficult to staff gasoline stations as the virus continues to spread. Gasoline sales have been reduced dramatically (well over 50%), but members are trying to remain open to serve those who are still required to get to work at essential businesses, especially healthcare workers and grocery store workers.

Risalvato continued “a temporary suspension of the laws that prohibit motorists from pumping their own gas would allow motorists to fill their own tanks and take their own hygienic precautions in order to avoid spreading Coronavirus. This is as simple as providing sanitizing wipes for customers to wipe gas nozzles which is exactly what grocery stores are doing with shopping carts. It is otherwise impossible for gas attendants and motorists to maintain the six-foot social distance that is currently required.”

In a letter that was written to Governor Murphy last week, Risalvato said “this is not a problem that our neighbors in New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania have had to deal with, it is a uniquely New Jersey problem that only you can address. I believe that should you take the action that I am requesting, it will prove to be another demonstration of just how serious your efforts are to persuade New Jersey citizens to avoid physical interaction whenever possible.”

