

Letters

Continued from Page 1A

review and approve letters, or perhaps simply revoke the First Amendment?" he said. "What happens if a potential buyer stops by in person to say hello? Should we lock them up? What does the state do when a potential buyer has FedEx deliver a letter directly to the seller? What about an email or text?"

Seattle real estate attorney Craig Blackmon agrees with the Oregon law. But if other states don't ban love letters, homebuyers and their agents will continue to send them, he says.

"This is about rooting out systemic racism, and real estate is one of the prime areas in which white privilege has benefited people," Blackmon said. "That said, if my clients have a really sweet family, a cute kid and a nice little puppy, guess what? I am going to have them send a love letter if I am not barred by the rules from doing it."

Meek, who is also a real estate agent, said he came up with the idea while co-chairing a state task force on racial disparities in homeownership. A home is often Americans' most valuable asset. Yet, nationally and in Oregon, Black Americans are the group least likely to own one.

According to a 2019 report from Meek's task force, more than double the percentage of white households — 65.1% — own a home in Oregon. Compared with the national average, the homeownership rate in Oregon is 28% lower for Black people, but only 12% lower for non-Hispanic white people, a USA TODAY analysis of Census Bureau and state data found.

No other state has followed Oregon's lead. And Bryan Greene, vice president of policy advocacy for the National Association of Realtors, said he's unaware of any lawsuits over love letters.

"I appreciate that, out of an abundance of caution, people want to address these issues to remove one more potential barrier to housing opportunity," he said. "But it's really hard to assess how appreciable a concern this is."

Industry reckoning with racist past

The backlash against love letters is part of an industrywide reckoning with its complicity in decades of housing discrimination and segregation that kept Black Americans from homeown-

ership.

In 2019, Newsday published the findings of a three-year undercover investigation that exposed discriminatory home-selling practices by real estate agents that helped keep neighborhoods in Long Island, New York, segregated. Agents treated people of color unequally, especially Black residents, the investigative found.

Efforts to reform racist practices and increase Black homeownership intensified after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

In June, the head of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Marcia Fudge, announced a plan to add 3 million new Black homeowners in the United States by 2030. As of 2019, there were 6.45 million Black homeowners, according to Census Bureau data. More than 100 groups are supporting the effort, including the National Association of Realtors.

"The love letter could influence the seller to favor one buyer over the other. In a world where discrimination still exists, that same love letter would allow someone to discriminate if they chose to or subject that buyer to an unconscious bias," said Gwendolene Newton, a Chicago real estate broker and president of the Dearborn Realtist Board, the nation's oldest African American real estate association.

Amy Kong, a real estate agent in San Bruno, California, said she has no trouble discouraging her sellers, many of them Asian, from reading love letters.

"The sellers I deal with understand that there are people out there being discriminated against," said Kong, president of the Asian American Real Estate Association of America.

Love letters got national attention last year when the National Association of Realtors warned members they were not as harmless as they seem.

Learning more about the people who want to buy your home is tempting, said Mary Pope-Handy, a real estate agent in Los Gatos, California, but she discourages homeowners from reading love letters.

"They see a photograph of a family with infant twins and people just melt. They just think, 'I really want to give this family a home.' Or this family is from my same Lutheran community or they are from my same Sikh temple," Pope-Handy said. "It's not like they are saying they are not going to sell to

See LETTERS, Page 4A



Customers dine out at restaurants after COVID-19 restrictions were loosened, on Wednesday, March 3, 2021 in Salem, Oregon. ABIGAIL DOLLINS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Restaurants

Continued from Page 1A

Jones figures he can keep the business going like this for another month or two at most before needing to cut staff.

To bring back indoor dining, Jones said he would need to see vaccination rates in Salem increase and transmission rates to drop.

As the highly contagious delta variant of COVID-19 continues to spread and health systems are struggling with rising hospitalizations, some restaurants and bars are ramping up safety measures. Some are even requiring proof of vaccination to dine indoors.

Is it safe to go to a restaurant that is fully open? Should people seek out places that require vaccinations? Do those Plexiglas partitions actually help? Here's what experts are saying about dining out during the spread of the delta variant.

How risky is it to dine out right now?

When deciding whether or not to eat at a restaurant, many factors determine the risk.

High levels of community spread, a category that currently engulfs almost the entire state of Oregon, puts everyone at some risk, though unvaccinated people not wearing a mask face the most serious risks.

"They have no protection against the virus," says Dr. Farshad Fani Marvasti, an associate professor and director of public health, prevention and health promotion at the University of Arizona College of Medicine-Phoenix.

Vaccinated people have a higher level of protection but still face some risks.

Vaccines have proven highly effective against severe outcomes from COVID-19, including hospitalization and death; however, breakthrough infections, where vaccinated people get COVID-19, are on the rise.

Vaccinated people who get COVID-19 may have mild or no symptoms. But they can suffer from what's known as long COVID-19, Marvasti said, when people develop long-term symptoms from the disease.

Another thing to consider is who you come in close contact with. Children under 12 years old cannot get vaccinations. So parents who go out to eat could potentially bring it home to their unvaccinated kids.

The risks of different types of dining

For months during the pandemic, takeout was the only way restaurants could serve customers. One silver lining of that experience is that most restaurants around the state are now better equipped to serve food-to-go.

Picking up food while wearing a mask or having it delivered to your door still remains the safest way to enjoy a meal that wasn't cooked at home. The CDC describes drive-through, delivery, takeout, and curbside pick-up options as the lowest-risk way to dine out.

At the other end of the spectrum, the CDC describes dining options with indoor seating, seating capacity that has not been reduced and tables that are not spaced at least 6 feet apart as presenting the highest potential risk.

As delta spreads, returning to some of the safety measures put in place earlier in the pandemic can help curb the spread. On July 27, the CDC updated its advice to recommend fully vaccinated people wear masks indoors. Gov. Kate Brown mandated indoor masking on Aug. 13.

At restaurants, it's impossible to wear a mask while eating, so trying to maintain a minimum of six feet of space between yourself and others becomes even more important.

When removing a mask to eat, those sitting outdoors are much safer, Marvasti says.

What COVID-19 safety measures help indoors?

Throughout the pandemic, restaurants and bars spent thousands of dollars on installing ventilation and filtration systems that clean and circulate the air, adding Plexiglas dividers between booths, transforming menus into scannable QR codes and adding lines of tape to indicate where people should wait.

But how helpful were these measures? "Ventilation systems are definitely helpful," Marvasti says, but "dividers really don't do anything."

He explained that the virus won't stop because there's a square of plastic to go around.

Before visiting a restaurant, customers can call or check social media to see what safety measures the business has put in place, from having a fully vaccinated staff to requiring servers or diners to wear masks.

Can restaurants ask for proof of vaccination?

One way some restaurant owners have chosen to try to protect their customers and staff is by requiring customers to show proof of vaccination.

Many restaurants have faced backlash for the practice. However, legally, it is within a restaurant owner's rights to ask about vaccination status. As private businesses, owners can legally refuse entry to unvaccinated people.

For those who are vaccinated, visiting a restaurant where everyone else is vaccinated as well can offer some peace of mind. It can also be less risky, says Marvasti says.

"If everyone at the restaurant is vaccinated, you reduce the chances of that restaurant being the source of an infection that leads to a hospitalization and death," he says.

Vaccinated people can still spread the disease between one another and bring it home to others, so dining out, even with proof of vaccination, is not entirely free of risk.

Reach the reporter at tirion.morris@arizonarepublic.com Follow her on Twitter at [@tirionmorris](https://twitter.com/tirionmorris), on Facebook at [Tirion Rose](https://www.facebook.com/TirionRose) and on Instagram at [tirionrose](https://www.instagram.com/tirionrose).



"For Sale" signs are seen outside a home in Glenview, Illinois. NAM Y. HUH, AP

Oregonians throw away
200 MILLION POUNDS
of clothing each year!

MAKE EVERY THREAD COUNT!

Reduce your clothing waste by
purchasing quality goods that last.

mcrecycles.net

LOCAL ADVISORS

Salem Area

Caitlin Davis CFP® FINANCIAL ADVISOR West 503-585-1464	Chip Hutchings FINANCIAL ADVISOR Lancaster 503-585-4689
Jeff Davis FINANCIAL ADVISOR Mission 503-363-0445	Tim Sparks FINANCIAL ADVISOR Commercial 503-370-6159
Garry Falor CFP® FINANCIAL ADVISOR West 503-588-5426	Tyson Wooters FINANCIAL ADVISOR South 503-362-5439

Keizer Area

Mario Montiel
FINANCIAL ADVISOR
Keizer | 503-393-8166

Surrounding Area

Bridgette Justis FINANCIAL ADVISOR Sublimity 503-769-3180	Tim Yount FINANCIAL ADVISOR Silverton 503-873-2454
--	---

Kelly Denney
FINANCIAL ADVISOR
Dallas | 503-623-2146

www.edwardjones.com
Member SIPC

Edward Jones
MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING

Do you own too many stocks? Let's talk.

08-00055203-01