



MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

December 31, 2019

Conference for Food Protection  
2020 Biennial Meeting  
30 Elliott Court  
Martinsville, IN 46151-1331

**RE: Amend Food Code – Permit Pet Dogs in Outdoor Dining Areas**

To Whom It May Concern:

I write on behalf of the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) to provide our strong support for the standardized language for the Model Food Code outlined in the 2020 Issue Submission titled: Amend Food Code – Permit Pet Dogs in Outdoor Dining Areas.

MSDH is committed to the highest standards in food safety to protect a consumer's health and well-being. Until recently, MSDH enforced the existing prohibition on pet dogs in any dining area of a food establishment in the Model Food Code. In July 2019, unaware of the prohibition, the *Mississippi Clarion Ledger* published a list of restaurants that allow dogs in outdoor dining areas. MSDH responded to the article with a reminder that the Mississippi Food Code did not allow pets in outdoor dining areas, and that any restaurant allowing the same was in violation of the state Food Code. That response was published by the *Mississippi Clarion Ledger* and engendered a public outcry from residents and restaurants alike, who had not been aware of the prohibition, and were confused as to why a practice they were already doing successfully was, in fact, illegal. After considering public sentiment, and keeping food safety concerns paramount, MSDH ultimately decided to adopt a new policy. As of November 2019, restaurants in Mississippi can now apply for a variance from MSDH to allow pet dogs in outdoor dining areas.

Eighteen additional states and the District of Columbia have already enacted similar policies to allow pet dogs in outdoor dining areas. However, each state has implemented different regulatory schemes, including differing signage and sanitation requirements. These differences have caused confusion for both customers and businesses. The proposed language would eliminate confusion by creating one national set of standards for businesses that wish to allow pet dogs in outdoor dining areas, while establishing strong regulatory requirements to ensure public safety.

MSDH urges the Conference for Food Protection to accept this Issue and incorporate the standardized language into the Model Food Code.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas Dobbs".

Thomas Dobbs, MD, MPH  
State Health Officer