

Thousands of pubs across Ireland push Government for #SupportNotSympathy as they pass five months closed – VFI & LVA

Grassroots social media campaign sees publicans, family members and staff in every county highlighting plight of sector as they pose outside their pubs

Thousands of pubs across Ireland pushed the Government for 'Support not Sympathy' on the day that marked the five month shutdown for more than 3,500 of the country's pubs.

The grassroots campaign, which was supported by the Vintners Federation of Ireland (VFI) and the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA), saw pubs from every county in Ireland take to social media to voice their frustrations with the lack of Government support for these pubs who have now been closed since 15th March.

Thousands of photos were posted across social media on Saturday under the #SupportNotSympathy campaign, targeted at national and local politicians. The photos featured publicans along with their family members and/ or staff posed outside their pubs, including many of the 25,000 people who are facing real difficulty due to the ongoing closure of non food pubs and the lack of support provided to them to date.

From Kerry to Dublin and Donegal to Wexford, publicans displayed solidarity for their colleagues across the country on this bleak date for the sector.

The campaign's message of #SupportNotSympathy emphasised their frustration with a Government which has expressed their "sympathy" for the sector, but which is yet to bring forward meaningful supports for those pubs that are still closed. Pubs were the first sector in the economy to close and they will be the last to reopen, having been singled out by Government for separate treatment.

The photos serve as a reminder to Government of the toll being paid by people in the trade who are increasingly fearful after Tánaiste Leo Varadkar TD said publicans were making a "sacrifice" for the country.

Pubs across Ireland originally closed on the 15th March and five months later more than half of the country's pubs – those that do not serve food – are still awaiting the opportunity to reopen. With the reopening date having already been twice postponed, there is mounting concern in the pub trade as to when they will be allowed to open their doors. Most publicans doubt their prospects will improve by the end of the month, the next possible but unconfirmed date for reopening. After five-months shut, VFI and LVA members want the Government to step in and support the trade until reopening becomes a reality. They are calling for the introduction of a 'Pub Support Package' which will provide direct financial aid to pubs that are closed by order of the Government. This grant is calculated on a pro-rata weekly basis, linked to the Re-start Grant Plus scheme announced by the Government.

Padraic McGann, VFI President, says: "It was heartening to see so many publicans come together to show support for each other on such a gloomy day for the trade. Irish pubs are internationally famous for their warm welcome so these families and staff standing in front of their pubs, fearful for their future, is a powerful and symbolic image. There is so much uncertainty in the trade."

Ronan Lynch, LVA Chairman, says: "The human side of the shutdown gets lost in all the debate about reopening phases and economic implications. This campaign highlights the people behind the trade, families who have been running pubs in some cases for generations. These are the people who are bearing the brunt of pubs being cast aside by the Government. Ordinary people going through a period of prolonged and unnecessary uncertainty. Thousands of these family businesses won't survive if this goes on much longer. The Government must come to the table with meaningful supports."

Donall O'Keeffe, LVA Chief Executive, says: "The Government is aware of what is required to help the pub sector. We have put forward realistic proposals that will support individual publicans on a weekly basis until they are allowed reopen. These supports must be introduced before the end of August as there is little optimism in the trade after two false starts. We are passed the point where 'sympathy' means anything, we need real supports for the thousands of people who are suffering because these pubs are being kept closed by order of the Government."

Padraig Cribben, VFI Chief Executive says: "Pubs are the last sector that remain closed under the emergency legislation introduced to tackle the pandemic. The hospitality sector reopened in June and its time pubs were allowed open and trade along with restaurants, cafes and pubs that serve food. Failing that, the Government must ensure publicans can survive until they are permitted to open. The consequences of ignoring the plight of over 3,500 publicans, their families and staff would be unthinkable."















