

April 9, 2020

Hon. Prabmeet Sarkaria
Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
7th Floor, 56 Wellesley St. W
Toronto, ON M7A 2E7

Re: Further support for small business during the COVID-19 pandemic

Dear Minister Sarkaria,

Thank you for your continued leadership during this unprecedented time. As the situation continues to evolve, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) is taking concerns from the business community and communicating them to all levels of government.

We are particularly concerned about the impacts the COVID-19 crisis is having on small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), charities, and not-for-profit organizations (NPOs) in Ontario.

I am writing to echo the following recommendations from the NDP's 'Save Main Street' plan:

- **A 75 percent commercial rent subsidy up to \$10,000 a month for three months.** The largest overhead cost for many SMEs, charities, and NPOs is rent. Unlike other operating expenses, this is a cost that businesses are unable to reduce. A rent subsidy would give organizations critical operational flexibility, offering valued leeway in adapting to the current and extreme economic environment, and could save the economy greater hardship by ensuring the workforce is maintained and by corollary, consumer demand.
- **A remote work set-up fund, which could help small businesses with things like building an online retail operation or buying laptops and software for staff.** The ability of the economy to cultivate operational flexibility is critical to ensuring valuable economic structures remain intact. Measures which allow businesses to more easily adapt to the current situation not only allows them greater capacity to meet current demand challenges but could offer the post-COVID-19 economy the knowledge and experience required to establish itself in the 21st century. Enhanced telecommunication and information technology capabilities will be invaluable in seizing the economic development opportunities of the future.
- **A designated emergency fund for small businesses and entrepreneurs who have faced historic barriers to accessing traditional capital, as proposed by the Canadian Black Chamber of Commerce.** Access to capital has long been an unnecessary barrier to growth and development in the SME sector. While enhancing capital access during the pandemic will provide integral liquidity to an otherwise arid credit market, the OCC maintains that access to capital was and will continue to be a barrier to Ontario's economic prosperity if not reconciled. Perhaps implementing such a measure when in our greatest need will highlight its enduring value.

As the voice of Ontario's business community, we understand the hardship organizations are enduring while COVID-19 abatement measures are in place and applaud government efforts to mitigate economic hardship.

Public health and safety are priorities for all Ontario organizations. The OCC will continue to monitor and assess new developments pertaining to COVID-19 closely and work with our members, partners, and all levels of government to provide support to Ontario communities.

Sincerely,



Rocco Rossi
President and CEO
Ontario Chamber of Commerce