

January 5, 2022

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance
Frost Building South
7th Floor, 7 Queen's Park Cres.
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y7

Re: Dire Straits for Ontario's Small Businesses

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy,

On behalf of our 60,000 members and 157 chambers of commerce and boards of trade, I am writing to thank you for the meeting amongst our staff today to discuss immediate relief to small businesses who are on the verge of bankruptcy in light of the new restrictions introduced this week.

We recognize that public health and a healthy economy are intrinsically linked. However, sweeping new restrictions – impacting employers, workers, and families – unaccompanied by immediate and commensurate supports will result in more business closures and job losses than necessary under the circumstances. We need a comprehensive plan that ties restrictions to clear, data-based metrics so that employers, workers, and families can plan.

Many businesses have suffered greatly throughout this crisis and continue to face unprecedented cash flow constraints and uncertainty. To summarize, we ask the Government of Ontario to:

- Extend the Small Business Support Grant for a third round targeted towards all businesses whose revenues are directly and/or indirectly impacted by current public health restrictions. Eligibility should include businesses previously eligible for the Ontario Tourism and Travel Small Business Support Grant and businesses losing revenue as a result of restrictions affecting their clients (e.g. food service suppliers).
 - Work with the federal government to increase rental subsidies provided under the newly expanded Local Lockdown Program similar to the enhanced Ontario-Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance Program for businesses directly or indirectly impacted by public health restrictions.
 - Immediately open the recently announced portal which would allow businesses to access rebates for property taxes and utilities, accompanied by rapid disbursements for eligible business expenses.
 - Expand access to rapid antigen tests and PCR testing, with priority given to Ontarians unable to work from home, both to limit unnecessary isolation time and allow workers to demonstrate eligibility for paid sick days and other supports.
 - Work with financial institutions and the federal government to forgive loans for businesses most severely impacted by public health restrictions.
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- Offer an additional grant to businesses required to implement the government's enhanced vaccine certification protocols and to cover increased pandemic-related expenses for PPE, improved ventilation etc.

Further, as current and future variants will continue to hamper economic activity, we call on the Government of Ontario to reduce uncertainty for business by developing a consistent plan that outlines how the Province intends to respond to the next stages of the pandemic and support those impacted by public health measures. Clarity and consistency on specific metrics that inform the government's decision to impose or ease restrictions are paramount for business confidence and continuity.

Thank you for your ongoing leadership and continued advocacy with the federal government to support Ontario businesses.

Sincerely,



Rocco Rossi
President and CEO
Ontario Chamber of Commerce