

November 20, 2020

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Re: Keeping Ontario Business, Workers and Citizens Safe – Meeting Request on Behalf of Ontario's Business & Retail Community

Dear Premier,

On behalf of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) and Retail Council of Canada (RCC), We would like to thank you for your tireless efforts in managing the challenges of COVID-19. We wish to acknowledge the hard work your entire government has put into facing this crisis and note how we sincerely appreciate what has been done to date to keep Ontarians safe. We are writing today to express concerns about the pandemic's ongoing impact on Ontario businesses and employees. We would welcome a meeting, on behalf of Ontario's business and retail community, to discuss these concerns in further detail with you.

We are greatly concerned about the second wave of the pandemic, which has surpassed the first wave and threatens to endanger more lives as cases grow exponentially. We have heard clearly from Ontario business and retailers with respect to their concerns about inconsistent and unclear public health guidelines; insufficient testing and tracing capacity; insufficient data on the sources of community spread; and a lack of timely and accessible supports for business.

Inconsistent and unclear public health guidelines cause confusion among businesses, employees, and consumers alike, and make it difficult for individuals to take appropriate action to protect themselves and their communities.

Insufficient testing and tracing capacity forces employees to take considerable time off work – and students to miss school – in order to get tested and await their results, harming productivity and putting unnecessary strain on families. A weakened tracing apparatus ensures that the province cannot accurately assess where and how the virus is spreading, ensuring that any efforts to target restrictions are merely best guesses that are often perceived as inequitable.

Finally, a lack of continued timely and accessible supports for business means that layoffs, closures, and bankruptcies will become more common; livelihoods will be destroyed, and communities will face a longer road to recovery. Of particular concern to many is that the 12 weeks leading up to New Year's Day can account for up to one-third of annual sales for retail business.

You are well aware of the challenges faced by business during lockdown and it has been clear that you have been placing great weight on the needs of business as your government issues restriction orders. However, even in regions of Ontario that are currently coded 'green', businesses and retailers are unable to make ends meet, as confusion over public health guidelines abound and residents rightly exercise caution. Unfortunately, those businesses and their workers are not eligible for many government supports due to their standing within low-restriction communities.

The greatest threat to businesses and workers is the virus. Therefore, any attempt to balance restrictions and lockdowns with supports only for those who have been hardest hit is insufficient to protect Ontarians.

We are hoping to meet at your earliest convenience to discuss these concerns and how the government can provide timely and appropriate supports for both businesses and individuals. When a period of recovery is well and truly here, we are confident that such an investment will prove to have saved both lives and livelihoods.

We sincerely appreciate our ongoing, positive relationship and your government's willingness to respond to the needs of the business community.

Thank you,



Rocco Rossi
President and CEO
Ontario Chamber of Commerce



Diane J. Brisebois
President and CEO
Retail Council of Canada