

April 3, 2020

Hon. Lisa MacLeod
Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
Hearst Block, 9th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 2A1

RE: Support for Ontario's tourism industry during the COVID-19 pandemic

Dear Minister MacLeod,

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.

I am writing to you to request that the Ontario government consider a series of actions to support Ontario's tourism industry as it experiences unprecedented revenue losses due to the pandemic. These recommendations echo those made by the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario.

First, the OCC would like to see a temporary amendment to the *Employment Standards Act* (ESA) to support tourism industry employers, particularly small businesses, who cannot continue to pay employees. Currently, the ESA allows an employer to avoid notice and severance obligations when they lay off employees with the expectation that they will return, unless the layoff exceeds 13 weeks in a 20-week period. That 13-week period can be extended to 35 weeks in a 52-week period under certain circumstances. However, many employers could not meet any of the conditions to extend the period to 35 weeks.

We recommend following the example set in Manitoba, where the government issued an order excluding the length of time that the emergency continued in that province from the length of time used to calculate the expiry of their short-term layoff provision.

Additionally, we encourage further action to support both commercial and residential tenants affected by COVID-19. This could include extending the halt on residential evictions to commercial tenants, providing rent deferrals, and encouraging landlords to set up relief funds for their commercial renters (as First Capital has done).

Given the regional nature of Ontario's tourism industry, it is critical that your government do what it can to prevent the crisis from aggravating regional disparities. We ask that you mandate a moratorium on provincial land taxes, land use permits, or lease fees for Northern Ontario tourism businesses until the end of June and include Indigenous organizations in all tourism business initiatives.

Finally, we recommend investments in targeted job training programs to support re-skilling and re-entry of workers. Similar efforts undertaken by OTEC and UNITE HERE/Hospitality Workers Training Centre in Toronto after the SARS crisis proved effective in supporting employee retention.

Public health and safety are priorities for all Ontario businesses. We 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 business.

Sincerely,



Rocco Rossi
President and CEO
Ontario Chamber of Commerce

CC:

Hon. Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, Government of Ontario