

March 26, 2020

Hon. Christine Elliot
Minister of Health
5th Floor, 777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

RE: Supporting renters during the COVID-19 pandemic

Dear Minister Elliot,

Thank you for your continued leadership to support both employers and employees as they experience economic disruption related to COVID-19. 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 take a series of actions to support and protect both commercial and residential tenants and landlords across the province.

We congratulate you for previously announcing a halt on residential evictions; however, commercial tenants are similarly at risk yet not protected by such a policy. The OCC asks that you extend this protection to businesses as well.

There have been many calls for deferral of commercial rents. While rent deferral policies may be useful in the short term – as the goal is to keep businesses in place so they can re-open – after months of no revenue a large rent deferral bill will force a business to close their doors for good. There are other options for supporting commercial tenants, including:

- Encourage corporate landlords to set up relief funds for their commercial renters (as First Capital has done).
- Expand the Toronto Rent Bank to the entire province and to commercial tenants. The Bank provides interest-free repayable loans for low-income households. This service could not only be extended outside of Toronto, but also to commercial renters who have experienced a precipitous drop in revenue. Corporate landlords could manage and/or contribute to this fund.
- Provide landlords appropriate access to small business aid packages, so that they are better able to cancel or defer rents for those tenants who cannot pay.

The OCC also supports the following options for supporting residential tenants:

- Expedite proposed changes to the Landlord and Tenant Board process to encourage alternative dispute resolution services such as mediation instead of a formal hearing. This would make it easier to resolve certain disputes and prevent a backlog at the Board. Landlords will not want to evict tenants during this crisis as it will not be easy to replace them; therefore, negotiations are the best way to support both.
- Exempt unemployed low-income households from rent in government-owned and not-for-profit housing, via transfers to municipal governments.

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. Rod Phillips, Minister of Finance, Hon. Doug Downey, Attorney General