



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

Honourable John Horgan, MLA
Premier of British Columbia
West Annex
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC
V8V 1X4

May 27, 2020

Dear Premier:

I am writing to express concern for the over 500,000 small businesses throughout British Columbia that are facing imminent closure due to significant gaps in the Province's economic recovery plans.

Over the past few weeks, I have heard from small businesses in every corner of the province who have told us that the available support programs are failing to provide them with any meaningful financial support. Most existing provincial and federal programs are inaccessible to the vast majority of businesses, or they are simply not practical to get relief to businesses fast enough to keep them in business. Many are facing the gut-wrenching reality of permanent closure this summer unless more effective support is immediately made available.

We all know that commercial rent relief is desperately needed right now, and yet the joint provincial-federal program — the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance program (CECRA) — is not available to most businesses in need. This program requires the participation of landlords, a growing number of whom have already said they will refuse to participate. Additionally, for a business to be eligible they must have seen a 70 per cent decline in revenue, a figure that excludes a vast number of businesses that still urgently need help. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, half of all small businesses say they will not be able to pay June rent without assistance.

Many small businesses also find themselves excluded from relief programs like the property and school tax deferrals, which only apply to landowners and not the majority of B.C. businesses who are tenants.

The available supports are simply not getting to small businesses who need them, and at this point, **we are not aware of any small business in the province that has received any direct cash relief from your government.**

BC Liberal Official Opposition
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4
T: 250-356-6171



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Therefore, the Official Opposition is again calling on your government to take immediate actions to support economic recovery in this province, including:

- temporary tax breaks — not simply deferrals — on PST, the EHT, and the Hotel Tax;
- a small business hardship grant as other provinces have already done;
- a moratorium on new regulations and policies that would add costs for B.C. businesses;
- funding from the WorkSafeBC surplus to secure personal protective equipment; and
- a short-term commercial rent relief plan that flows relief directly to tenants if landlords do not apply, and that includes a no-eviction backstop.

Finally, regarding a proposed national sick leave program, hard-working small business entrepreneurs simply cannot afford to take on any additional costs as they rebuild. No employee should have to choose between their health and a paycheck. Likewise, closing small businesses because of unsustainable increased costs means *everyone* loses their income. That is why federal support is needed to fund any national sick leave program so as not to put the financial burden of such a program onto the shoulders of small businesses.

Ninety-eight per cent of businesses in B.C. are small businesses, and they employ over 1 million British Columbians. Today, many of these businesses are on the brink of bankruptcy. You cannot afford to delay support to them any longer, or we risk losing thousands of small businesses that strengthen our economy and enrich our communities.

We urge you to act quickly to get real and effective supports into the hands of B.C. small businesses, as time is running out for many. There can be no economic recovery if we do not come together to help small business get back on their feet.

Sincerely,

Andrew Wilkinson
Leader of the Official Opposition