



The Honourable Mona Fortier  
Member of Parliament for Ottawa—Vanier  
233 Montreal Road  
Vanier, Ontario K1L 6C7

March 20, 2020

Dear Ms. Fortier,

We find ourselves in very challenging times, and I hope you are keeping well despite the daily pressures and concerns we are all facing.

I am writing to you today on behalf of the Ottawa Coalition of Business Improvement Areas (OCOBIA). OCOBIA is the unified voice of the 19 Business Improvement Areas within urban, suburban and rural Ottawa who represent more than 6,400 businesses and their 120,000 employees. Together we advocate for the interests of our business members and the greater community on a host of issues.

As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, we are in close contact with our members to offer support and assistance as they navigate significant changes and an unknown future. We genuinely appreciate the Government of Canada's efforts to manage the situation and the relief measures provided thus far.

After speaking to my OCOBIA colleagues and hearing from hundreds of business and small commercial property owners this week, we estimate that up to 50% of businesses in the retail, hospitality, personal care, and tourism sectors, located in Ottawa area BIAs, may not be able to survive over the next four weeks. We ask that you please consider the following feedback and share our insights with your colleagues.

Our small member businesses in the restaurant, retail, and service sectors have been pleased with some of the measures announced - in particular the program to extend Employment Insurance eligibility to a wider range of employees and self-employed individuals. This provides a cushion for their staff members who may have already lost hours, tips, and job security. And, the tax payment deferrals will also provide a way to postpone one set of future costs.



However, our smallest and most vulnerable members are expressing widespread dismay that there was no \*direct\* financial relief program provided in the very short term to offset the massive losses in revenue that have already occurred - to say nothing of the looming market vacuum that we are told to expect will continue for many weeks or months to come.

Our members feel that the offer of easier BDC credit at market rates would only increase their debt loads at the worst possible time. And, we have not heard of a single closed business that would benefit from the program offering to cover only 10% of the salaries of retained employees. This isn't a realistic or helpful option for owner operated shops with 5 or fewer employees that need to drastically cut their costs immediately in order to make their end of month lease or mortgage payments in just 10 days.

Other jurisdictions have recognized the vital need to rapidly shore up small businesses to avert a collapse of their retail sectors and vital Mainstreet districts. Just a few hours ago, we note that the UK announced \*grants\* of £25,000 for small retail, hospitality, and tourism businesses on top of other tax measures and loans.

Please let us know if additional direct relief measures such as the UK example are being considered, or ideally about to be announced. Our members are making existential decisions now that will deeply affect our community and the economy of Canada, and such assurance could help them stay positive and hopeful a bit longer.

Thank you for your hard work in these trying times. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require additional information.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Kaluski".

Mark Kaluski, Chair

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