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Thursday May 21 COVID-19 Update

Dear neighbour,

This week, the Ford Government voted unanimously against a [motion for a public inquiry into long-term care homes](#). I spoke on the issue and read out letters from family members in our riding. Thank you to the many of you who shared your stories with me and the Ontario Government.

Since the pandemic, the big three for-profit long-term care corporations have hired close allies of Doug Ford to protect their financial interests through lobbying. The inquiry that Ford and the PC MPPs voted against would have included an examination of why for-profit long-term care homes have had significantly higher death rates of seniors than public and community long-term care homes.

On the morning of our motion, the Ford government announced they will set up a [commission on long-term care](#) instead. A public inquiry is an official and independent process set out by law in The Public Inquiries Act. A commission is a government-controlled internal review. This is not good enough. We need a public process in order to fully address the issues and make the systemic changes that are desperately needed. I will continue to fight to get long-term care residents and their families the answers they deserve.

Yours,

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Jessica Bell (MPP for University-Rosedale)

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Classes cancelled for the rest of the year

On May 19th, the Ontario Government announced that classes [will not be resuming for Ontario public school students](#) this school year, meaning that students will learn from home until the end of June. As the parent to two young children, I know firsthand that this is difficult for parents and caregivers. While we want to ensure that schools remain closed until it is absolutely safe, we also need the government to provide more support to families to get through this difficult time. I stand with my colleague, Education critic Marit Stiles, in highlighting that as parents return to work and child care centres remain shut, the [government needs a plan to step up support for families](#).

Additional education updates:

- Childcare centres and daycares remain closed for the time being. They will be included in the Stage Two reopening, subject to key public health indicators.
- There is a protocol in development to facilitate the retrieval of personal belongings from school lockers, subject to approval by public health

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- All overnight summer camps will be cancelled this year.
- Summer day camps may be able to open in July & August, subject to key public health indicators. We will let you know as soon as we get an update.
- A plan for reopening schools in September will be announced by the end of June.

Testing continues to lag

As we move forward with reopening services and look to ease physical distancing, we need to recognize that we are still failing to hit testing targets. In fact, we haven't used Ontario's full daily testing capacity even one time over the last month. The Ontario Government must do its part and dramatically increase testing and contact tracing so we can safely and carefully open the economy. Andrea Horwath shared the following in a press release today:

"Everyone is eager to start easing restrictions, but Doug Ford needs to dramatically ramp up testing and contact tracing to make it safer for everyone when we do that," said Horwath. "No one wants to see Ontario take one step forward and two steps back. We don't want to see more people getting sick, and freshly re-opened businesses having to close again, because of outbreaks — and the solution to that is to test, test, test, and have the capacity to trace every positive case."

Masks are now recommended

Canada's public health experts are now [recommending that everyone wear non-medical face masks in public](#) when they aren't sure that they will be able to keep their distance from others. The Ministry of Health is also recommending (a) wearing a mask in public where physical distancing is not possible and (b) that passengers should use a mask on public transit. You can read more about the recently released face-covering recommendations [here](#).

I speak out for small businesses at

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Small businesses across University-Rosedale are going under. Two thirds of commercial tenants didn't make May's rent. Despite the crisis, Premier Ford said on Friday that [he will not be freezing commercial evictions](#), and instead called on "vicious" landlords to be flexible with their tenants. Requests aren't working, rules will.

On May 19th, [I spoke out on this issue at Queen's Park](#) to ensure

that the Ontario Government hears the stories business owners in the riding are telling me.

I spoke about [An Tran](#) - a parent of two (the youngest was born this month!) and a first-time business owner of the bakery Ba Noi on Bloor Street. He has invested everything into his business which was set to open its doors in March.

I spoke about Mathew Languay who is the owner of [Basecamp Climbing](#). He invested thousands into renovating a former adult movie theatre into a popular gym and community hub.

And I talked about Il Gatto Nero, an Italian restaurant open on College Street since 1960 and run by Carmine and Michael Raviele. Now forced to [close permanently](#).

All of these businesses are now closed, some temporarily and some for good. These businesses make our city. They employ our neighbours and give Toronto its character, its culture, and its identity. That is why I am calling on the Ontario Government to put a moratorium on commercial evictions now and to provide rental support to commercial tenants. You can help us by taking action [here](#).

Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy extended

On May 15th, the federal government announced that it would be extending the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) until at least the end of August. CEWS was previously set to expire in the first week of June. Information on the program and how to apply can be found [here](#).

OSAP application process now open

The Minister of Colleges and Universities announced that those most in need can apply to the [Ontario Student Assistance Program \(OSAP\) for the 2020-21 school year](#). In the release, the Minister also states that, acting on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ontario's postsecondary institutions are developing their plans for the fall term - exploring a range of delivery options depending on the trajectory of COVID-19.

Border to remain closed

As provinces slowly reopen, Canada's border with the United States will [remain closed to all non-essential travel until at least June 21](#).

Some park amenities to open this weekend

The City of Toronto has announced they will open more than 850 park amenities this week including picnic shelters, soccer fields, baseball diamonds, and basketball courts. Individuals may use outdoor sports facilities and multi-use fields for non-team sports. Individuals are not permitted to play team sports, such as soccer or baseball, even on fields intended for this purpose unless they are members of the same household. The City's COVID-19 Enforcement Team will continue monitoring popular parks across the city to ensure residents are practicing physical distancing. You can read more about what amenities will be opening [here](#).

Recognizing Personal Support Workers

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would like to highlight the story of a PSW working in my riding, Jeffrey Vdovjak. Here is his story.



"I am a frontline worker who recently began working with a Private Pay Homecare program in an effort to support our seniors during the COVID-19 emergency.

On my first day when I showed up for what I thought would be an orientation I found I was the only PSW for two units totalling over 25 seniors. Turns out we are always understaffed, often working at 20% staffing levels. I spend my days caring for clients, trying to make their time as good as possible, and helping them stay healthy. COVID begins with breathing difficulties, which moves to fatigue. Soon clients begin refusing food and getting them to eat and drink is increasingly difficult. **We are there the whole time. It is gut-wrenching work: the whole time.**

I spend 30 minutes or more after my shift sitting with them, holding their hands, and showing them the pictures of loved ones because they cannot visit.

I am a 36 year old, tough as nails; I've worked hard my whole life. **But the level of work that is required of our PSWs, RPNs and RNs right now is too much. And yet they bear it.** My back aches, my feet ache, and all I can do when I come home after quarantine-style strip down is lay down to recover. I haven't taken a lunch break since I started – I often leave late. And yet it is worth every minute. I am glad that I quit my job to come to Toronto to support our seniors.

I was embarrassed today – although the chaplain assured me not to be. **I couldn't keep from being emotional because our seniors were dying alone; the people that I am caring for are dying away from family.** Care isn't easy, but caring is so much harder—and I couldn't stop from momentarily crying. We need more help.

Some of us have moved and are paying two rents. Others are self-isolating and paying two rents. I am lucky that a Torontonian has offered me a basement apartment while I serve our seniors. I hope you will consider supporting me and my colleagues by not leaving us behind. We really are on the front-lines of a battle which is claiming so many.

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PSW.”

Let's celebrate PSWs and show our appreciation for their work by [acting in solidarity](#) to call for higher wages, better PSW to patient ratios, PPE for those who need it, a full public inquiry on Long Term Care, and protection from workplace violence. [Sign a petition in support of these demands here](#).

Watch our townhall on Work in the Time of COVID-19



On May 19, I hosted a townhall to answer questions you have about working during the pandemic. Thank you to Deena Ladd, coordinator of the Toronto Workers' Action Centre, and Jamie West, MPP for Sudbury and a lifelong advocate for workers' rights, for joining me to answer your questions. You can [watch the town hall in full here](#).

Today's COVID kindness feature

Today I want to highlight an example of how a small action can turn into so much more when someone gets their neighbours and community involved.

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Rachel Lissner, a member of the University-Rosedale riding association and regular volunteer with my office, simply wanted to order some authentic Montreal bagels to celebrate officially filing her Canadian citizenship papers. She opened up her order to include neighbours and community members and, before she knew it, she had ordered 20 giant boxes boxes - that's 2,160 individual bagels that arrived on her doorstep this morning. **By asking those ordering to chip in a donation to the neighborhood organization Sistering, she raised over \$800 to support their frontline anti-poverty work.** Read more about Rachel's record-setting bagel order and its unexpected impacts [here](#).

Have an example of COVID kindness for us to feature on social media or in an upcoming newsletter? Please send it my way!

Note that this email and all previous COVID-19 updates are available at: www.jessicabellmpp.ca/coronavirus

As always, if you require urgent assistance from my office, please contact my team at 416-535-7206 or email us at jbelle-co@ndp.on.ca

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