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March 25, 2020

Dear friends,

Today I have been thinking of all the frontline workers – grocery store clerks, paramedics, TTC operators, delivery couriers, shelter staff, and health care workers – who are working around the clock to keep us safe. These folks are heroes, and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

Let's thank them by doing our part and staying home and social distancing. Please note that the City of Toronto is now asking residents to cancel all social gatherings (including kids' playdates or a coffee with a friend) and limiting trips outside the home to groceries, necessary commutes, and limited exercise. More information is available [here](#).

Mayor Tory also announced today that the City of Toronto is closing all playgrounds and park amenities to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

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

Ontario Financial Statement

This afternoon, the Ford Government tabled their Financial Statement, which is a condensed economic update due to the COVID-19 pandemic (the full budget will be released later this fall).

While we are still analyzing the Government's plan, here is a brief summary of what's included:

- \$1 billion pandemic contingency fund

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- \$75 million for personal protective equipment for front-line workers
- One-time payment for parents of \$200 per child (12 years old and under)
- Doubling the GAINS supplement payments for low-income seniors
- Deferral of OSAP payments for 6 months
- Five month interest and penalty-free period for businesses on provincially administered taxes

What's noticeably lacking is any true help for people that are struggling right now. Sadly, the Ford Government refused to adopt the Ontario NDP's recommendation, which would have seen the government send \$2,000 Ontario Emergency Income cheques to all households right away who are experiencing unemployment or lost income during the COVID-19 crisis.

Other items that are missing include:

- No significant income assistance for people who have lost their job or income due to the pandemic
- No rent subsidies or emergency assistance for renters
- No stabilization fund for non-profit organizations, like food banks
- No support to recruit and retain Personal Support Workers

The truth is, this plan will leave people waiting for federal assistance that will not arrive until late April at earliest, and still fall short of people's needs. Now is not the time for half-measures.

It's time to give people the money and help they need, so they can weather this storm — so that we can get through this, together.

Mandatory Self-Isolation for Travelers

The federal government made two significant announcements today. The first is that 14-day self-isolation is now mandatory for all travellers who have returned from outside Canada. The formal order to self-isolate now comes with a potential fine or possible arrest for those who refuse to follow it.

More information on how to self-isolate effectively is [available here](#).

Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)

The second federal announcement was that the government has streamlined and increased the two federal emergency benefits that were announced last week (the Emergency Care Benefit and Emergency Support Benefit) into a single, more accessible benefit: the CERB.

According to the federal government, the CERB would cover Canadians who have lost their job or are not getting paid because of COVID-19, are sick, quarantined, or taking care of someone who is sick, as well as working parents who must stay home without pay to care for children because of school and daycare closures. The portal for accessing the CERB will be available in early April.

We are gathering more information about this benefit and how it will work for workers who are eligible for EI, and those who are already receiving EI payments. Our office will continue to provide updates as we learn more.

In addition, the federal government confirmed that the Canada Child Benefit will be increased by \$300 per child for this year. Qualifying parents will receive the extra amount as part of their May payment.

Essential Workplaces

Yesterday, the Government issued their list of essential businesses and work that will continue through this period. The full list is here <https://www.ontario.ca/page/list-essential-workplaces>

The Government's toll-free helpline for businesses with questions about what classifies as an essential workplace is: 1-888-444-3659.

I'm hearing your questions about how extensive the list of essential businesses is. Your concerns are legitimate, and the government needs to explain some of the items on that list.

Additional News

The University of Toronto has cancelled Spring convocation ceremonies. Graduates will still receive degrees, in the mail.

You should be aware that this self assessment for COVID-19 has been posted if you want to assess yourself in relation to the disease: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/#q0>

As many have said, stopping the spread of COVID-19 is a marathon, not a sprint. These are uncertain times, but I know we can adjust our routines and behaviours to help keep everyone safe.

We're all in this together.

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Jessica Bell

Jessica Bell (MPP for University-Rosedale)



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