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Hon. Prabmeet Sarkaria
Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction
VIA Email

Hon. Mary Ng
Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade
VIA Email

December 14, 2020

Honourable Ministers,

I am writing to you regarding concerns raised by small, independent business owners in my riding of Davenport.

As I know you are aware, small businesses across the province are struggling in this pandemic. In Toronto, although many barely survived the first lockdown, the actions and participation of small independent businesses were crucial to our ability to limit the impact of the first wave of COVID-19. Through the summer and early fall, these same businesses adapted to constantly changing directives and protocols, moving to outdoor dining or online sales. They had already spent precious dollars investing in PPE and other adaptations.

Many expressed to me their hope that government had listened and learned from the first lockdown and the issues in the delivery of support and relief programs. They hoped that governments at all levels would improve roll-out of programs and communication of protocols.

Sadly, they have been proven wrong.

Over the course of the pandemic, I have spoken with many of the small business owners in my community. I have identified numerous issues. I have raised these issues in the Ontario Legislature and with my federal counterpart, MP Julie Dzerowicz. I want to outline for you some of the continuing issues, on behalf of these constituents in the hope that these gaps and obstacles can be addressed before even more stores close and restaurants are boarded up.

- Fairness and equality: small businesses are seeing customers shift over to big box chain stores – during this crucial holiday buying season -- while they struggle, due to unfair and inequitable application of the lockdown.
- Small family-run businesses are slipping through the cracks, unable to qualify for federal supports, including the PPE grant.
- New businesses that opened during or soon before the pandemic are finding out they do not qualify for federal supports because they can't prove enough lost income.
- The important restaurant supply chain is at risk as suppliers also fail to qualify for support and restaurants face closure.
- Those that are fortunate enough to qualify for financial supports are telling me they are inadequate, and that application processes are overly complicated. Small businesses in my community are calling for an

increase to Main Street Relief Grants to \$2500/month with a one-time application process, and they are asking that this remain in place for the duration of the pandemic.

- Businesses also need as much notice as possible when public health restrictions are being introduced so they can adjust their operations and give their employees notice of changes or new protocols. While I understand these decisions are made based on available evidence, it is vital that the government make efforts to give as much notice as possible.
- The threat of eviction still looms large for small businesses, especially since so many were unable to get support from CECRA. Despite the fact that a broader rent relief program was finally announced, the current provincial eviction moratorium is still based on eligibility for the old program. Our small businesses need greater certainty through this difficult winter season.
- Reports of serious insurance gouging are yet another weight around our local businesses in Davenport. This is a sector that needs to be looked at carefully to prevent profiteering during this pandemic.

Ministers, I cannot express enough the weight of these issues on my community. Small businesses really are the heart of our neighbourhoods and their loss is shaking us to the core. It is truly heartbreaking to hear from small business owners who feel their government is not listening to them, that no one cares. Community members are really concerned that only the biggest chain stores and giants like Amazon and Walmart will be left after this pandemic. I implore you not to let that happen.

This is the time to take action to ensure that these businesses can get through this time, and to stop the inevitable and deep repercussions for our economy.

I welcome the opportunity to speak further about these issues and work together to implement immediate solutions.

Sincerely,



Marit Stiles
MPP Davenport

cc.

Julie Dzerowicz, MP for Davenport
Bloorcourt BIA
Bloordale Village BIA
Dovercourt Village BIA
Fairbank Village BIA
Corso Italia BIA
Ossington BIA

Regal Heights Village BIA
St. Clair Gardens BIA
Little Portugal on Dundas BIA
Oakwood Village BIA
College West
College Promenade
Rogers Road BIA