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April 8, 2020

The Honorable Christine Elliott, Minister of Health
5th Floor, 777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON, M7A 2J3
christine.elliott@pc.ola.org

Dear Minister Elliott,

Multiple residents have contacted our offices to ask that community gardens be identified as an essential community food service and be exempt from the recent closure of recreational spaces.

Community Gardens are not simply recreational spaces - many provide an essential function by supplementing residents' diets, increasing access to more culturally appropriate food, making grocery dollars go further, and increasing local resiliency. At a time when people are being asked to minimize their visits to grocery stores, gardens provide an alternative source of high quality, healthy food. Many gardens also donate to food banks, supporting our most vulnerable residents.

Access to the outdoors also has proven links to mental health, which is essential in this time of crisis. Our office has been in touch with Ottawa Public Health, who have indicated that if the Province were to allow the opening of gardens later this spring, they would be prepared to provide guidance for their use, with express training for physical distancing and other techniques to minimize COVID-19 risks. Of note, both the City of Gatineau and the entire province of British Columbia has stated that community gardens are essential at this time.

We ask that you reconsider the designation of community gardens as a non-essential service and allow our residents to grow food in a safe, responsible manner under the direction of Ottawa Public Health.

Sincerely,

Shawn Menard
Councillor, Ward 17, City of Ottawa

Rawlson King
Councillor, Ward 13, City of Ottawa

CC: Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario: premier@ontario.ca
Joel Harden, Member of Provincial Parliament, JHarden-CO@ndp.on.ca
Lucille Collard, Member of Provincial Parliament, LCollard.mpp@liberal.ola.org
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