



April 8, 2020

Karen Casey
Department of Finance
7th Floor, Provincial Building
1723 Hollis Street
P.O. Box 187
Halifax, NS
B3J 2N3

RE: COVID-19 Business Response

Dear Minister Casey,

I am writing to thank you for your continued leadership to support both employees and employers as they experience disruption related to COVID-19. As the situation continues to evolve, the Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce is hearing concerns from the business community and we are communicating them to all levels of government.

A great number of businesses have reached out to us as their “voice” to government sharing the demanding challenges they are now facing amid much uncertainty. Many are nervous to take on more debt yet have relentless bills to pay. Several employers and their employees have transitioned to working remotely, however, their productivity is impacted by the dire state of rural internet services. For those fortunate enough to still be in operation, their difficult situation is compounded by being tasked with co-ordinating staff remotely, attempting to stay connected with clients amid closures, dealing with creditors, navigating a continuous stream of information related to COVID-19 and in some cases educating their children or caring for ill loved ones.

The magnitude of assistance businesses need right now cannot be underestimated along with the concern over their mental well-being.

We applaud the province’s efforts to offer a Worker Emergency Bridge Fund and Small Business Impact Grant to complement emergency support announced by the federal government.

We have heard from several businesses that their landlords were not willing to make alternative arrangements creating additional pressures for them, despite efforts by the province to provide a viable solution. This is extremely concerning for the Chamber as some of our members, many who were legislated to close, are ill equipped to pay these costs and are in urgent need of financial assistance.

Another issue brought to our attention is that while not all businesses have the capability of introducing remote working, those that do may be faced with considerable costs. We would ask government to consider a program to help small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) fund remote work options.

We were pleased to see the province issue a robust list of tenders for the procurement of supplies and services. We ask you to do everything within your ability to avoid delays in awarding tenders to support



Nova Scotia businesses. Government should do all it can to accelerate payments owed to private sector and non-profit vendors, to help get much-needed cash into the hands of SMEs as quickly as possible. Despite efforts by government to assist with business support programs, there remains a segment that are falling through the cracks and cannot access much-needed help. We would encourage your government to reach out to our Chamber and others in the province to work collaboratively on solutions that serve all demographics.

Our Chamber is also requesting that the Nova Scotia government work with municipalities to support local businesses as they experience unprecedented revenue losses.

Public health and safety are priorities for all Nova Scotia businesses. We will continue to monitor and assess new developments pertaining to COVID-19 closely and work with our members, partners and all levels of government to provide support to business.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads 'Sherry Martell'.

Sherry Martell
Executive Director
Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce