



Department of Inclusive Economic Growth
CIBC Building
1809 Barrington Street, Suite M103
Halifax, NS
B3J 3K8
IEGMinister@novascotia.ca

May 20, 2021

Re: Support for small business during provincial lockdown

Dear Minister Labi Kousoulis,

We are writing to you today on behalf of the members of the Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce (the second largest chamber in the province outside HRM), the Pictou County Chamber of Commerce and the Amherst Chamber of Commerce, collectively serving more 825 members that represent a diverse cross section of the local economy.

The pandemic has tested our business community. They have been very resilient and tolerant managing the ebbs and flows that have resulted from an ever-changing landscape for which they operate. While the government programs offered through this period were very welcome and well received, no one in their wildest dreams would have believed that the pandemic would last through three waves over a 15-month period with the end still far from sight.

With the extension of lockdown measures announced Wednesday, May 19, many businesses are feeling defeated and disenchanted. Hope of survival for small business owners is dwindling even as vaccines are being distributed. Through the third wave, small business has held on to the hope that complete business closure measures would be short term. Faced with another month of restrictions, small businesses are unfairly harbouring the weight of flattening the curve while big box stores, that often sell similar products, are left to operate with minimal restrictions. The disparity threatens the future of small business.

Many small businesses report sitting on inventory that they cannot sell. Many items are seasonal and the opportunity to sell these products is limited. Businesses, particularly in rural areas outside HRM, have diverse offerings that enable businesses to thrive during four seasons of the year. Allowing them to offer “essentials” by appointment is one way government can offer support in addition to emergency funding programs, which many do not qualify for due to criteria.

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Many businesses have transitioned to a partial E-Commerce and pickup service in an effort to stay afloat. For some the cost to do this has been an impediment. This takes resources and not all businesses or customers gravitate to this model. Some flexibility to allow a controlled in-person shopping experience will be the difference in some businesses making it through the pandemic still in operation.

Government must recognize the disparity between urban and rural community's that do not have adequate access to high-speed internet, or even cell service, to carry out business in these suggested forms.

We have heard your government's messages clearly that it is up to individuals to consider what is and is not "essential." Small business is essential, they provide the majority of jobs in this country. To show favour to allow large corporations, big box stores, to provide access to products and shutter small business selling similar products demonstrates a lack of understanding of business operation in rural areas.

We would ask that the lock down provisions be amended to allow small businesses to offer sales on an appointment basis with limited hours to customers from their own municipality, stringent COVID-19 public health measures in place and contact tracing records maintained to limit risk. We ask that the option for limited appointments be implemented immediately to support small business.

For 15 months our businesses have been asked to bend, and bend again, they are now at the breaking point and many are literally broke. Allowing limited appointments could be key to saving many of them that will shut their doors in the coming weeks without this support. We appreciate and understand the challenges and complexity to manage this pandemic, while ensuring the public has access to essential items. We would welcome your swift attention to this important matter and look forward to working with you to support business.

Sincerely,

Executive Director
Truro & Colchester Chamber
of Commerce

Executive Director
Pictou County Chamber of
Commerce

Executive Director
Amherst and Area Chamber
of Commerce

CC: Scott Farmer, Deputy Minister, Office of Inclusive Economic Growth
Bernie Miller, Deputy Minister, Office of Strategic Management