

July 29, 2020

Hon. John Horgan, Premier
Hon. Lisa Beare, Minister of Tourism, Arts & Culture
Hon. Dr. Bonnie Henry
Hon. Adrian Dix, Minister of Health
Government of British Columbia
Victoria, BC

RE: URGENT - Request of Revision to Restrictions on Events

Dear Premier Horgan, Minister Beare, Minister Dix, Dr. Henry,

First let me begin by continuing to extend our thanks for your tireless work in protecting the health and safety of residents across British Columbia. We are appreciative of the work you have done and continue to do since we first felt the impact of COVID-19. We recognize that our province could be in a very different place if it weren't for your leadership and guided approach.

On behalf of the British Columbia Hotel Association, its members, and accommodators across the province, I am reaching out with regard to the [revised Public Health Order](#) surrounding food service establishments, liquor services and events that went into effect on July 23, 2020. Under conditions surrounding events, section six outlines that "an event may only be hosted between noon and 11:00 P.M., and no more than two events may be hosted in one day on the same premises or in an area of the premises." The lack of clarity on the difference between events and meetings is a critical issue.

Our association has received messages from hoteliers across the province that have voiced serious and immediate concerns regarding this restriction and what this means to their business. While we understand that this restriction was likely put in place due to the outbreak that took place in Kelowna and is restrictive to quell the resulting spread of COVID-19 at night clubs and bars, WorkSafe BC has confirmed that this mandate will also be enforced for any small meetings and intimate events. These are controlled gatherings with carefully adhered to safety measures for which the time restriction does not make sense.

As you must know, our industry has been one of the hardest hit due to limitations on travel and additional restrictions mandated as a result of COVID-19. The average provincial occupancy level currently sits at approximately 30%, a number that will surely drop as we enter the fall. For your reference, historically hotels need to sit above 65-75% occupancy to remain solvent due to taxation and fixed costs. Currently, approximately 20% of hotels across British Columbia that temporarily closed due to COVID-19 have not yet been able to reopen. With compounding fixed costs and no relief from the provincial government, we anticipate that close to 30% of hotels in the province will be forced to permanently close by Spring 2021. This also means that we will lose thousands of jobs from each community in our province and our once thriving tourism sector – which annually generated \$8.3 billion in provincial GDP from \$20.5 billion in direct visitor spending – will be significantly impacted once again.

While hotel operators across B.C. have been more than compliant in amending safety protocols and procedures in order to safely welcome guests, their revenue streams have clearly taken an unfathomable hit. One of the last avenues afforded to operators has been meetings and intimate events; many purpose-built hotels see the majority of their

revenue generate from this pillar. In keeping in-line with health and safety guidelines, accommodators have heeded your recommendations and have transitioned to small-scale events and meetings, proving that these gatherings can be done safely under government mandated safety measures.

By now implementing a restrictive timeline, enforcing that events and meetings can only be held from noon until 11pm, hotels will suffer even further. While protecting guests, employees and our communities remain fundamental to our industry, we know hotel operations can and have been delivering safe meeting venues for under 50 people, while adhering to the BCCDC guidelines, very successfully. The corporate and government world, which is what the meetings market is, does not meet in the evening – they meet in the morning. Therefore, we request a revision for meetings in hotels be lifted immediately.

Our formal request is to eradicate the restrictive timeline on hosting meetings and events. Should you decide to keep this restriction in place we are certain that even more hotels will be forced to close and permanently terminate their employees and our community members in the process. Our industry, in some areas of the province have been able to bring back employees due to the meeting market restarting on a small scale. The impact of this restriction if not revised, will mean those employees will once again be laid off due to the cancellation of the meetings on the books before noon.

I implore you to read the below plea from a hotelier surrounding the impact this measure has had on her business. As with many of our members, she remains confused on this mandate and has requested immediate and further clarification:

“Where is the logic in having events and meetings start at 12 PM instead of 8 AM as most of the small events we still have in our hotels? Our industry has already been impacted by this pandemic, if we are now losing even the small meetings we still have going, with most of them being 8-4 events, this will have dire consequences on all of us. We have clients that are contracted for the beginning of August and need clarification on this at the earliest opportunity.”

We would also like to flag section three of the Public Health Order which reads:

“Despite section 2, if an event is taking place in area of the premises which is completely separated from the rest of the premises, and which has its own entrance and washrooms, there may be additional patrons present in other parts of the premises who are not attending the event, if the total number of patrons present on the premises does not exceed the maximum number of patrons permitted on the premises under the safety plan. Patrons attending an event in an area of a premises must not have contact with patrons on the premises who are not attending the event.”

In terms of hotel operations for hosting events and meetings, this is simply unfeasible as hoteliers often have a large number of guests staying on-site and on the premises while meetings and intimate events take place at separate areas of the property. Accommodators are dedicated to protecting the safety of each individual that steps through their doors and complying with updated regulations. However, these new measures require further tweaks to make sense for the reality of hotel operations in order to keep these businesses solvent.

In our province, approximately 80% of accommodators are small business owners that come from family-run businesses. These are people who have worked tirelessly to contribute to their community, employing residents, becoming a vital fixture in their regional infrastructure, and being a fundamental component to their local economy. We trust that you

understand our concerns and will take immediate action to amend the BCCDC guidelines to allow meetings in hotels before noon.

Thank you for your time, your leadership and your willingness to revise the current restriction. I am requesting a meeting at your earliest opportunity. I will make myself available either in person, by phone or via zoom.

Best Regards;



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