



Wayne Gates MPP, NIAGARA FALLS

2020-24-04

Hon. Rod Philips
Minister of Finance
Frost Bldg S 7th Flr,
7 Queen's Park Cres,
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y7

Minister Philips,

I am contacting you today regarding our concern for small and medium sized businesses in Niagara, many who have shut their doors since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. These businesses are the fabric of our community—they are fueled by the hard working, creative, and innovative people of Niagara. However, without the proper support from their provincial government, some will likely have to keep their doors shut permanently.

Since this pandemic began and we started to limit physical interactions, anxieties grew and then businesses began to close I continued to remind our community that we would get through these difficult time—together. That last word is of particular importance, we cannot come out of this unless we all work together and support each other. This includes our provincial government.

We have seen some individual and business supports from the federal government, but very little from the province. I hear from business owners in Niagara every day and I can tell you, they are concerned. They are navigating the federal support programs, but struggling to receive assistance from the province.

We know this is going to have a significant impact on Niagara. Niagara has several dominate industries and we know they have already been impacted by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Tourism and agriculture, including greenhouses are important areas of the Niagara economy that have been and will continue to be hit hard from the necessary public health measures in place.

In tourism, with nearly 36,000 workers in Niagara, we have seen an 11.5% decrease in employment by March 15—we expect that number to grow. These decreases were measured before many of the closures of tourism related businesses in Niagara, once the next Labour Force survey is published we expect the numbers to be considerably grim, which will include employers like the two Niagara casinos who employ thousands of Niagara residents.

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In agriculture, a survey completed by the Niagara Economic Rapid Response Team found that nearly 80% of employers have already lost revenue due to COVID-19, with 30% stating their revenue loss are between 75-100%. These are concerning statistics for two vital industries in Niagara, that unfortunately I feel are only going to get worse. Ultimately, survey respondents estimated a total of \$1.4 billion lost in Niagara due to COVID-19.

We have a plan for some supports, to ensure that small and medium size business can come through the other side of this situation whole. The plan, supported by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses includes:

- A 75 per cent commercial rent subsidy up to \$10,000 a month for three months
- A utility payment freeze
- A remote-work set up fund, which could help them with things like setting up an online retail operation, or buying laptops and software for staff
- An auto insurance grace period for taxis and car-sharing drivers, established in partnership with the insurance industry and the Financial Services Regulatory Authority
- A designated emergency fund for small businesses and entrepreneurs who have faced historic barriers to accessing traditional capital, as proposed by the Canadian Black Chamber of Commerce.

The cost of the Save Main Street plan is estimated to range from \$850 million to \$1.15 billion.

I ask that you seriously consider these initiatives. We will get through this together, but we must act now to support the integral parts of our community like small and medium size businesses.

Thank you,

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