

April 2, 2020

Honourable Carole James, MLA
Minister of Finance and Deputy Premier
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4
Via Email: FIN.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Re: COVID-19 Provincial Economic Stimulus – Phase 2 Recommendations

Dear Minister,

Thank you to both you and the Premier for your government's ongoing efforts to counter the health, social and economic impacts that is the COVID-19 pandemic facing our community and our province.

On behalf of the Richmond Chamber of Commerce - representing 14,000 Richmond businesses, of every size and from every sector – I want you to know our Richmond Chamber of Commerce is committed to working with the BC government to protect the health of all British Columbians while we continue to build on the bold and immediate fiscal solutions your government put forward to safeguard Richmond and BC's economy and the viability of our members.

As a member of the BC Chamber network, the Richmond Chamber of Commerce fed into the BCMindreader.com COVID-19 Business Impact Survey that was able to provide invaluable insight in real time on the dire impact this pandemic is having on our members' day-to-day operations. More importantly, we were able to share what the provincial government can be doing to support our local and provincial businesses and workers. And for that reason, the Richmond Chamber of Commerce, along with the BC Chamber, supported the provincial government's initial package of economic and financial support for businesses and their employees that looked to "fill in the gaps" or to enhance the initiatives rolled out by the federal government.

Of course, the Richmond Chamber of Commerce is always actively listening to our members to hear what they think would best support them in the next phase of stimulus. As businesses and not-for-profits continue to see revenue decrease, fixed costs and other expenses are challenging viability of their operations. That is why we are writing to voice our support for the BC Chamber's letter to you with eight (8) further proposed actions below can provide further needed relief to businesses:

1. Business Rent Assistance

As businesses may not expect to reopen before the summer, paying the monthly rent is the most top of mind concern for many businesses right now. A potential model for this support is the Rental Assistance for individuals. We would also recommend the subsidy double direct to businesses' landlords like the residential rental subsidy recently announced by your government.

This provides a double benefit by ensuring landlords (who are businesses themselves, in many cases) keep money coming in to pay their bills. Government should also consider a temporary restriction on commercial evictions, similar to residential evictions, during the pandemic.

2. Allow for Deferred Municipal Property Tax Payment and Look at Covering a Portion

Another significant line item for any business is property tax. By providing businesses the ability to defer paying municipal property taxes without penalty for 6 months, the provincial and local governments will provide liquidity that can support businesses and their employees. Government should look at covering a portion of these property taxes so as not add extra burden on businesses as they eventually start to recover from the crisis.

3. Freezing the Scheduled Minimum Wage increase for 6 months.

For most businesses, the largest operational cost is labour. With the next scheduled increase to the minimum wage set for June, this will add a new layer of cost right when BC business will be hopefully looking at starting to recover. To make sure, we don't stall business, we ask the government to freeze the minimum wage increase for 6 months.

4. No Constructive Dismissal Claims for COVID-related Layoffs

As part of new unpaid COVID-19 leave options, the provincial government should clarify employers will not be subject to constructive dismissal claims that meet the criteria of a COVID-related layoff or at least have the Ministry of Labour provide written clarification that the allowance for "unforeseen circumstances" under the Employment Standards Act applies to workplace disruptions caused by COVID-19. This temporary response is for only during the COVID-19 crisis.

5. An EHT Payment Holiday, not just a deferment, for the first 6 Months

Deferring the tax remittances for EHT, PST and several other taxes for the next 6 months is tremendously helpful to business, which is why was made that a foundation of our initial asks of government.

The one challenge, especially with respect to the EHT (which is based on payroll regardless of revenue), is that for many businesses they are making little or no revenue currently, so paying the deferred EHT in the future will bite into future earnings. Providing a 6-month holiday on paying the EHT could mean up to \$950 million stays with the business, while ensuring no additional burden, in order to help keep the company viable and their workers employed.

6. Ensure Financial and Regulatory Relief/Support for Credit Unions

Government and financial institutions have heard the need to keep our economy liquid. Credit unions are stepping up to provide mortgage deferments, fee rebates and low interest/zero

interest loans/lines of credit to workers and business, so we encourage the government to ensure financial and regulatory relief/support for credit unions.

7. Provide Funding to Assist Businesses Setting Up Remote Working or Online Commerce

While not every business can set-up to work remotely or sell their goods and services via online commerce, the provincial government should still create a fund to support businesses that can implement this option. It will keep business operating and employees working, which is vital at this time.

This is also a future-oriented opportunity because as we recover from COVID-19 these businesses will likely continue remote work options that can reduce congestion and help achieve our GHG reduction targets.

8. Revise the Government Entities' Account Payables Policy

Require all crown corporations, public health authorities and other provincial agencies to have a revised Account Payables policy that is net 10 days, down from the usually 60 days when purchasing goods and services from business.

We hope you find these further actions helpful in planning your next steps in support of members here in Richmond. Thank you again for your bold leadership and the opportunity to engage with you in this ongoing dialogue on how we rise to the challenge that is COVID-19 – *together*.

Sincerely,



Fan Chun
Chair
Richmond Chamber of Commerce

CC:

Hon. John Horgan, Premier of BC
MLA Jas Johal
MLA Linda Reid
MLA Teresa Wat
MLA John Yap
City of Richmond, Mayor and Council
BC Chamber of Commerce, CEO Val Litwin