

April 1, 2020

Honourable John Horgan
Premier, BC
PO BOX 9041
STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Sent via Email Premier@gov.bc.ca

Dear Premier Horgan:

We would like to thank your government again for the first phase of the COVID-19 Action Plan. The Plan contains a number of measures to support households, workers, and businesses affected by the ongoing pandemic which will provide much needed relief for many of those who need it, including those who are most vulnerable during these exceptional times.

We know from ongoing surveys being done by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the B.C. Chamber of Commerce, as well as what we are all hearing from our members directly, that measures that help with cash flow are particularly important.

We appreciate your government's openness to collaborate and receive input from the business community on further measures that will help see our province through these challenging times. We are all in agreement that we must work together to maintain business resiliency in the face of the current public health crisis.

It's becoming clear that further provincial government assistance to business is urgently needed to protect jobs and reduce the incidence of insolvencies. It is vital that such assistance flow as expeditiously as possible. A survey taken last weekend by CFIB shows 42 percent of businesses are worried about having to close their business permanently.

The following is a list of ways that government can provide further relief to our struggling business sector:

Providing Liquidity – Relief from Fixed Business Costs

- 1) Suspend B.C. Hydro billing for a period of three to six months for businesses of all size.

- 2) Cover property taxes for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis (a minimum of 25 percent overall reduction in annual property tax, including Class 1, 4, 5, and 6, for commercial property owners and owners of purpose-built rental with 3 or more units). Relief should be passed onto commercial tenants by landlords. In addition, the government should institute *temporary* eviction restrictions for commercial tenants and provide guidance to commercial tenants and landlords on writing agreements to cover the COVID-19 crisis period.
- 3) Government should provide additional COVID-19 crisis assistance to cover fixed costs as circumstances warrant.

(On March 30, CFIB provided recommendations for federal and provincial action in this area.) See: https://teamcfib.cfib.ca/teams/pubaff/Media%20Releases/2020-03-30-NewsRelease_COVID19-rent.docx

- 4) Defer stumpage payments for BC forestry companies for 6 months to free up much needed cash flow to support continued employment, payments to contractors, and timely operational restarts post-crisis.

Employment Measures

- 5) Ensure that employment standards cover the COVID-19 period, work with federal programs, and do not inadvertently create additional costs and stress for employers. For example, if COVID layoffs go beyond existing employment standards provisions, the government should ensure that employers are not faced with severance costs and constructive dismissal claims. Also, if an employer cannot top up the 75 percent federal wage subsidy to 100 percent, that should not be considered constructive dismissal for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency. To be clear, we are seeking *temporary provisions* to cover this extraordinary circumstance and protect as many livelihoods as possible.
- 6) Provide an on-line training grant to individuals idled as a result of COVID-19. This has the benefit of making use of downtime to enhance skill sets that will contribute to B.C.'s economic recovery once the current crisis abates.

Tax Relief

- 7) Suspend collection of the Employers Health Tax for six months.
- 8) Suspend WorkSafeBC premium collection for six months.

Prompt Government Payment to Vendors

- 9) Expedite payments to vendors owed by the provincial government and its Agencies, Boards and Commissions. For example, the provincial government was recently apprised of lagging payments to contractors working on the Site C Clean Energy project. Concerted provincial government efforts to expedite payments for services rendered are a tangible way that government and its statutory bodies can assist with acute cash flow issues being faced by many B.C. businesses.

Policy Reviews

- 10) Suspend any new regulatory, policy and legislative initiatives and related consultations until further notice and ensure that any measures in the “policy pipeline” support economic resiliency and post-crisis economic recovery efforts.

Thank you again for consideration. We look forward to continuing joint efforts to help our province navigate through the current public health crisis and to help make BC’s economy as resilient as possible.

Sincerely,



Business Council of
British Columbia
Est. 1966

Greg D'Avignon
President and CEO
Business Council of BC

BC Chamber of Commerce
Know what's on BC's mind.



Val Litwin
President and CEO
BC Chamber of Commerce

CFIB
CANADIAN FEDERATION
OF INDEPENDENT BUSINESS.

Laura Jones
Executive Vice President &
Chief Strategy Officer.
Canadian Federation
of Independent Business

**BC COUNCIL
OF FOREST
INDUSTRIES**
FORESTRY FOR THE PLANET.
FOREST PRODUCTS FOR THE WORLD.

Susan Yurkovich
President and CEO
Council of Forest Industries



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bridgitte".

Bridgitte Anderson
President and CEO
Greater Vancouver
Board of Trade



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Gardner".

Chris Gardner
President,
Independent Contractors
and Businesses Association



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne McMullin".

Anne McMullin
President & CEO

CC: Honourable Carole James
Minister of Finance

Honourable Michelle Mungall
Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Competitiveness