



4 June 2020

Premier Blaine Higgs
Chancery Place, P. O. Box 6000
Fredericton, NB E3B 5H1

Via email: blaine.higgs@gnb.ca

Dear Premier Higgs

Re: Request for Provincial Small Business Reopening Program

As New Brunswick embarks on the early days of the COVID-19 recovery and reopening process, many of our members and small businesses in general are struggling to adapt to the new reality of operating in the pandemic era. Running a small business was a perilous endeavour before the crisis – now many are faced with lower capacity, nervous customers, lack of staff, and loss of revenue for the past three months amongst other costs. They are now absorbing costs associated with Public Health requirements and recommendations to keep their staff and customers safe and they need your help.

We are asking the Government of New Brunswick to establish a small business reopening support fund that would provide grant funding to small businesses to bridge the reopening process and assist with refitting their space with safety paramount to all operators. The Province of Nova Scotia launched the [Small Business Reopening and Support Grant](#), which you may want to consider as a model.

After Minister Steeves' economic update last month with a projected deficit of \$300M, it is plain to see the economic devastation the pandemic has caused. We do not make this request lightly. We are as concerned with the province's debt and deficit as anyone – including government. All of our organizations have advocated and spoken extensively about the importance of sound fiscal management in the past and have given your government much praise for the tough decisions made to bring stability to the province's finances.

We still believe fiscal restraint and balanced budgets to be a fundamental cornerstone of getting New Brunswick on a growth trajectory in normal times – but these are not normal times. What's most important now is ensuring that we can help as many small businesses as possible and save jobs. There will be no recovery if we reach a tipping point of businesses that go under.



Businesses have been hanging on, waiting for the chance to reopen or waiting for business to pick up, but that doesn't mean they're going to make it. We submit that this type of program is a true investment with ROI for two main reasons:

- Assistance with reopening is direct and effective economic development. These businesses already exist, already employ New Brunswickers and are doing their best to stay open and operational. Helping these businesses and saving those jobs is easier and more effective than any other avenue available to government. Crucially – the benefits are immediate. Of course investment attraction and supporting start-ups are important – they are key to future and long-term growth - but if you want help with the 2021-2022 budget, keep the businesses we have right now.
- Businesses being more prepared for the pandemic era will help keep our economy running smoother with fewer interruptions. As we saw in Zone 5 the past two weeks, all it took was one infection to spread and cause (a) Zone 5 to move backwards in the recovery process; and (b) the entire province to be delayed moving forward to the second part of the “Yellow” phase. How much did that cost the province? How much would be saved if this program prevented even one such outbreak?

We thank the government and the all-party cabinet committee for what you've collectively accomplished through the crisis. New Brunswick's Public Health outcomes have exceeded everyone's expectations – the “Hammer” was a big success. Now that we are into the “Dance”, realities are hitting business every day - for many of them another rent payment was due on Monday on the same day that eviction projection lapsed and property tax had to be paid by property owners. They could use a hand up and signal from your government that we are in it together for the long-run.

Sincerely,

John Wishart, CEO
Chamber of Commerce
For Greater Moncton

Krista Ross, CEO
Fredericton
Chamber of Commerce

David Duplisea, CEO
Saint John Region
Chamber of Commerce

cc: Hon. Mary Wilson, Minister of Economic Development and Small Business
cc: Hon. Ernie Steeves, Minister of Finance
cc: Kevin Vickers, Leader, Liberal Party of New Brunswick
cc: David Coon, Leader, Green Party of New Brunswick
cc: Kris Austin, Leader, People's Alliance of New Brunswick