



April 19, 2021

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON
M7A 1A2

Dear Premier Ford:

Re: Reform COVID-19 Operating Restrictions Framework: A Responsible Business Protocol

The Whitby Chamber of Commerce represents recognizes the damaging toll the pandemic has had on Ontario's business community. Forecasts of rising business bankruptcies, supplier, and bank delinquencies due to operating restrictions imposed by lockdowns and lockdown frameworks are alarming.

Given the long-term forecast, now is the time to revisit and refine the regional operating restrictions framework to ensure it keeps Ontarians safe, builds business confidence and does not unduly harm our economy. We stand with our Provincial counterparts copied on this letter and recognize their innovative and responsible approach to revising the current Provincial framework. Thank you specifically to the Brampton Board of Trade for recommending the Responsible Business Protocol in January 2021.

The "[Responsible Business Protocol](#)" refines the current colour-code system, calls for better definitions of safe operating protocols by sector, and recommends adding a community contact reduction framework to better address pandemic spread. Most importantly, the recommended Responsible Business Protocol puts the onus on businesses to adhere to a common safe operating framework to continue to remain open. In essence, it is a solution that simplifies understanding of rules by sector, addresses community contact reduction and most importantly, minimizes further damage to our economy while fighting the spread of COVID-19.

At the heart of the Protocol is the understanding that compliance with safety standards is an integral part of running a business. It impacts every size and sector from retail to restaurants, from construction to manufacturing. The primary reason Ontario businesses are leaders in workplace safety is that they protect their employees and customers. Compliance with regulations that continue to evolve is taken seriously. Businesses are accustomed to having their operations depend on their compliance with current safety standards.

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Businesses in Ontario follow the Occupational Health and Safety Act closely or face penalties that can include jail time and fines. **Overwhelmingly, businesses feel that it is fundamentally unfair that their operations are required to shut down or forced to significantly change their service model because of the products and services they provide rather than their adherence to safety protocols.** This approach shuts down some businesses, while allowing others to operate with very few restrictions.

Today, we are requesting that the Ontario government establish a Responsible Business Protocol that includes the following elements:

- 1) **A Safe Operating Framework (by business sector)** – The framework should advise business owners on operating guidelines for their establishment (restaurant/hair salon/gym, etc.) in order to protect their staff and clients from COVID-19 exposure.

Example: In a barber shop, for example, our position is that regardless of how many chairs in the shop, consistent operating safety protocols (i.e. spacing of chairs/plexiglass-dividers) can be established to ensure that all businesses would be treated equitably. The issue of capacity at which they would be allowed to operate is guided by the Community Contact Reduction Framework described in point #2.

Once a safe operating framework has been established by Ontario for each sector, the safety measures for each business should not vary based on what product you sell, geographic area or establishment size etc. This framework differs from the current one in that Ontarians can take comfort in knowing that the key issue is not business safety, but community contact.

- 2) **A Community Contact Reduction Framework (based on regional virus spread).** As the cases rise in a particular region, the government should enforce reduction in community contacts. We know it is not the business itself that becomes less safe, it is the contact between community members that is less safe. And at this time with no plans to offer paid sick leave, or broaden vaccination plans to include ‘essential’ factory workers, we must act immediately.

As such, we recommend that the new protocol establishes a framework that identifies how individual contacts must be reduced and would outline capacity restrictions, across the board, for public-facing businesses.

Example: In the Green level, for example, all public facing businesses would operate at 100% customer capacity (because they are already implementing safe operating protocols as per point #1) **and** as the case level rises in that region capacity is reduced by 20%. This allows more businesses to stay open and changes the message to the community.

Essentially, the message to Ontarians is that these operating restrictions are about the community's actions to reduce their own contacts rather than the current messaging, which unfairly closes or restricts trade for small businesses.

The Responsible Business Protocol, together with a safe operating framework by sector and community contact reduction framework, fairly applied across the board (i.e. both at national big-box and local retail stores) is a much better way to combat COVID, build consumer and business confidence, and not unduly harm the economy.

We welcome an opportunity to discuss this matter further at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Karey Anne Large
President, Board of Directors
Whitby Chamber of Commerce

cc: Hon. Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
Hon. Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development
Hon. Prabmeet Sarkaria, Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction
Hon. Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance and President of The Treasury Board
Hon. Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ontario
Rocco Rossi, President & CEO, Ontario Chamber of Commerce
Mr. Lorne Coe, MPP, Whitby
Mr. Ryan Turnbull, MP, Whitby
Mr. John Henry, Regional Chair & CEO
Mr. Don Mitchell, Mayor, Town of Whitby

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