



**The Regional Municipality  
of Durham**

Office of the Regional Chair

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**John Henry**  
Regional Chair and CEO

March 17, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.  
Prime Minister of Canada  
Langevin Block  
Ottawa ON K1A 0A2  
[pm@pm.gc.ca](mailto:pm@pm.gc.ca)

The Honourable Doug Ford, M.P.P.  
Premier of Ontario  
Legislative Building, Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M&A 1A1  
premier@ontario.ca

**Re: Support for Durham Region Businesses and Affected  
Employees through the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Premier Ford:

Thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On behalf of the Region of Durham, I commend the efforts of the federal and provincial governments to contain the spread of virus and for supporting our frontline healthcare providers who are working to keep our communities safe.

We are writing to share the urgent concerns of our business community and the need for immediate action. We have partnered with the Durham Chambers of Commerce and Boards and Trade as well as municipal economic development staff to understand how COVID-19 is impacting local businesses. We have received several hundred survey responses from businesses and the answers have been clear:

Many businesses are suffering financial impacts. The lost revenue or cancelled services are causing extreme uncertainty. Some business owners are worried about permanent closure.

Several local businesses have already reduced staffing levels and with continuing decrease in demand for services, additional layoffs are imminent. Business owners are concerned about the long-term effects of this crisis on their staff, including the health impacts of stress, the financial

impacts of reduced wages, the overall fear of returning to work, and the impact on their families.

Business owners need support. They need guidance on how to handle benefits and time off for both their employees and in some cases, themselves. They need guidance on how to continue to respond to and support their staff, develop business continuity plans and general direction about how to access existing and emerging government supports.

Specific business program needs include financial assistance for fixed costs, tax relief and extension to government deadlines.

The Region of Durham is supportive of our business community. Our joint survey with the Chambers and Boards is an important first step in identifying the concerns of the business community. We would be happy to share the survey data if needed to support efforts by the federal and provincial governments. At the Region we have established [www.durham.ca/novelcoronavirus](http://www.durham.ca/novelcoronavirus) as the singled point of reference for current health and other information. We will continue to work with the Chambers, Boards and local municipalities to provide additional information and resources to businesses that need it now.

Our communications and marketing teams are working on ways that the community can support our local businesses, while ensuring that residents are still social distancing and preventing transmission. Staff are promoting the wide variety of no-contact delivery options available to residents for locally-produced food.

Despite these efforts, our business community urgently needs help from all levels of government. We are asking our federal and provincial partners to work with us to support our local businesses with interim measures to get through this period of uncertainty. We recommend implementation of programs such as immediate and long-term loans to ensure businesses can be maintained. Extension of the tax deadlines will also reduce stress for business owners. Long-term programs that provide financial relief and stimulate business activity will be necessary to ensure the future of Durham's business community.

We look forward to working with you to develop and share clear, coordinated communication about measures developed to assist businesses, employees, and their families.

Yours truly,



John Henry,  
Regional Chair and CEO

cc: Durham Region MPs  
Durham Region MPPs