

December 15, 2020

Dear Premier Ford and Minister Elliott:

Small businesses have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. They were asked to close in March and only offer curbside pick-up or delivery. In October the province restricted indoor dining during the COVID-19 resurgence and now have been forced to close, once again.

We respect the efforts that have been made to safeguard our communities during this extremely challenging time. The problem is that the current policy of segregating “non-essential” retailers from those deemed essential might actually be making things worse.

- Shutting down Windsor Essex County will not reduce the number of shoppers.
- It will funnel shoppers and the corresponding health risk into fewer, increasingly crowded stores within the Windsor Essex County region, as well as adjacent communities. This potentially creates greater health risks.
- As the current policy pushes more consumers to a handful of big box retailers and discount stores, thousands of small, independent and local stores sit shuttered, with their hands tied, even though many sell the very same goods.
- In the process, retail businesses are being destroyed and tens of thousands of jobs are being lost.
- Once lost, many of these jobs won't return.

We ask that you move immediately to open all retail in Ontario, and impose a certain capacity limit on “non-essential” retail in lockdown regions, just as several other provinces have done, all with guidance and support from public health officials. This will put fewer people in more stores, increasing safety for all. The current policy does the opposite.

Capacity restrictions backed by strong social distancing and other safety measures already in place will deliver better health outcomes in a way that is effective, fair, saves jobs and supports local businesses and families.

On behalf of our local small businesses, members of our BIA, community members and individuals that depend on the retail sector for their livelihoods, your thoughtful consideration and bold leadership on this matter will be greatly appreciated.

Respectfully,

Essex Centre BIA Board of Directors

*Supporting Local Matters*

