



Wednesday, September 01, 2021

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Hon. Adrian Dix
Minister of Health
Government of British Columbia
Parliament Buildings – Room 337
PO Box 9050, Stn Prov Govt,
Victoria, BC
V8W 9E2

Via Email – HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Dix:

May I thank you in advance for taking some time to review the contents of this letter written by me on behalf of the Alberni Valley Chamber of Commerce an organization about to celebrate 55 years advocating for the local business community.

Over the past couple of weeks, I've been inundated with phone calls, text messages, and emails from many Businesses and Chamber colleagues who are concerned about the upcoming changes to their operations effective September 13/2021. Those changes are of course related to the implementation of BC's Vaccination Passport Program.

Please allow me to confirm that a significant majority of our businesses support vaccination and for the most part they confirm willingness to work with Government through the life of this public health crisis. That said, there are many concerns some of which I will highlight at the end of this letter via direct quotes received from many of our businesses, in particular the local restaurants.

Our Chamber is most concerned about the well-being of local employees many of whom are young, inexperienced, and we all know that a significant majority of these young people are female. We continue to learn of aggressive behaviour often directed at the front-line employees such as we witnessed recently at the Dairy Queen in Port Alberni. A shameful interaction shared widely across the Country. While many of us will suggest that this was a one-off situation it can also be argued that 'mask anger' is happening all the time, with some confrontations reaching extreme levels.

We also remind Government that along the way our Restaurant & Fitness Club owners, along with other similar businesses, have been expected to respond to orders with little or no notice. Just last week our businesses were expected to mandate masking with less than 24 hours notice. The upcoming changes slated for September 13th are only giving our businesses three working days to sort out the training and scheduling based on the confirmation that the program will be announced 'after' the Labour Day Weekend. That's simply not enough time.

As you read through the comments from our Restaurant Owners may I ask that **you reconsider the plans and instead focus, at least initially on the large-scale events such as concerts, sporting events etc., recognizing that those organizations will be more likely to have the manpower in place and financial ability to manage the additional task.** When doing so please also consider the importance of safety in the workplace. It is incumbent upon us all from the Business Owner to associations like ourselves, to law enforcement, health authorities, school administrators and all levels of Government to ensure that our workforce personnel are always kept safe. **Any program initiated by any must always consider that basic element.**

The comments (non-edited). Note that this is only a sampling of those received.

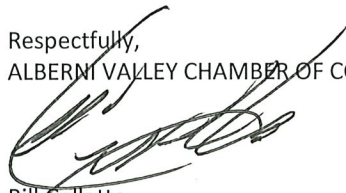
- I have lots to say on this subject as customers have brought me to tears the last 2 days and I'm ready to walk away from the café.
 - *(The 2 days refers to the days after the reintroduction of mandatory masking)*
- I will not comply with the order because of staff safety and my own. If it comes to it, I will close the business and release all of my employees.
- We have already seen a decline in customers due to the mask mandates. It makes it increasingly difficult to staff accordingly when the government makes these announcements without warning. The passports are going to add 1 more struggle and added pressure. Reading FACEBOOK the last 2 days has left me feeling nauseous. Our staff are not law enforcement, and it makes it hard for them to do their jobs. Our staffing crisis is only going to become worse.
 - *(The writer also confirmed the likelihood of selling the business. This restaurant often must close due to a lack of employees. They are one of the better-established restaurants in Port Alberni)*
- We support vaccination, even mandatory vaccination however we do not believe that the hospitality industry should be a scapegoat that is used as punishment against people who choose not to be vaccinated. We are a professional industry providing jobs, paying taxes, and contributing positively to our cities and we don't appreciate Government flip-flopping on rules and moving the goalposts whenever they feel like it. Between this and their exclusionary policies against new businesses we are not particularly happy with our government at the moment.
- We will not ask for passports. We will not force our employees to get immunized. We will stick with COVID safe protocols and sanitation recommendations.
- Enforcement will be put on our staff, and we could lose business that we need going into the slower times. We are very concerned about the enforcement side of things.
- The whole tyranny of these orders is blatant. Our industry has taken such a hit the last year and half and this is just adding another nail. That nail for some will be the final one. It's ludicrous to expect staff and management to manage every customer's health passport. Travelers will once again be reduced to take-out and there go our tourist dollars once again. I've talked to many who are not willing to get vaccinated and most of those folks have informed us that they simply won't go out. We expect at least a 50% revenue decline on top of the already 50% that we have been left with. Are they trying to collapse all small business? It's a disaster.
- I try not to get political at work, it has caused divisions among staff and patrons. I am worried that business will decline. We are given yet another hurdle to jump. One thing I find frustrating is you must be vaccinated to come into the restaurant only to be served by an unvaccinated server.
- Are we thrilled about it? No. Are we preparing for the screaming and fights? Yes. Do we already get yelled at on a the daily regarding masks? Yes.
 - *(This restaurant has resorted to closing many days due to lack of employees)*
- I'm in favour of the vaccination program however I'm concerned about my staff and their ability to manage it. Makes no sense that an unvaccinated employee can reject an unvaccinated guest. I have a real problem with that.
 - *(This owner is supportive of the program but also wants to ensure that employees are forced to vaccinate. He's prepared to take extra steps to ensure that his staff are all onside.)*

- *These comments suggest another option for Government to consider and that's one of encouraging businesses to introduce the vaccination passport perhaps through tax incentives or other creative initiatives.*
- The more people vaccinated the better. However, in a 'quick service' restaurant environment where we do not have a host or greeter it's just not feasible or possible to enforce. We will end up being the vaccination police and our employees will end up enduring significant stress from our guests. The vaccination passport concept is even more divisive (than the masks) so I can see a lot of conflict.

In conclusion I emphasize the importance of ensuring the safety of all people in our workforce. The evidence is clear. **Should we proceed with this mandate on September 13th we will be placing our workforce at significant risk.** May I also reiterate the idea of starting carefully by way of the large-scale events and from there determine next steps with careful consideration and collaboration with all parties.

I also suggest that Government consider a change of focus and work toward a program of Education, Information, Encouragement, Support and Reward so that we paint a picture of prosperity alongside the desire to beat this thing once and for all.

Respectfully,
ALBERNI VALLEY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Bill Collette
CEO

cc: Dr. Bonnie Henry – Provincial Health Officer
Hon. Josie Osborne – MLA – Mid-Island Pacific Rim
Hon. Ravi Kahlon – Minister of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation
Hon. Mike Farnworth – Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General
Hon. Melanie Mark – Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport
Ms. Terry Deakin – President Alberni Valley Chamber of Commerce
Ms. Debbie Haggard – City Councilor – City of Port Alberni
Ms. Fiona Famulak – President/CEO – BC Chamber of Commerce
Mr. Ian Tostenson – President/CEO – BC Food and Restaurant Association