



Monday, April 19, 2021

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Hon. Josie Osborne – Minister of Municipal Affairs
3945B Johnston Road
Port Alberni, BC
V9Y 5N4

Via E-Mail Josie.Osborne.MLA@leg.bc.ca

Dear Minister:

We are writing to you today to outline our concerns regarding the ongoing restrictions levied against the Food/Beverage Industry throughout British Columbia.

Last week our Chamber hosted a Zoom meeting attended by several of the area's local businesses owners most affected by these restrictions. While many understood the intent, they at the same time feel isolated and penalized vs. other industries. For lack of better words "they feel targeted."

In our own observations we have seen incredible efforts from all in our community, and quite likely other jurisdictions, where these very businesses have complied and often exceeded the requirements presented by the PHO and Government in general. In fact, we are not aware of any incidents where a local business affected by these latest restrictions has been fined or otherwise flagged by WorkSafeBC, or local By-Law enforcement.

We now understand that the restrictions are likely to extend to May thus further impacting an already vulnerable segment of our local businesses.

This is very concerning for all. While we've so far avoided local devastation in the F/B sector we are being advised by many that they won't be able to recover if these restrictions continue. We are also told by the group that the 'circuit breaker' response announced earlier in April is welcome, but it is flawed, and miniscule in terms of what is really needed. Some suggest that even though they would qualify for the \$5000., that may only buy them an additional week or two before insolvency becomes their reality.

Some points made during the conversation for your consideration:

- Most suggest that the restrictions on them will translate (and already is) into a lack of available Human Resources if/when things improve. This is a major concern shared by all on the call.

- One local restaurant owner has worked hard to develop a Take-Out program. The owner confirmed that the day prior to the call they received but one Take-Out order.
 - AVCOC sees this sort of statistic as likely for many of our local restaurants. The community is too small to realize a viable TOAD (Take – Out and Delivery) for the number of businesses that are being forced into that reality.
 - AVCOC fears that the BC wide restrictions are unfair and unrealistic. We suggest, as many others already have, that the Province look to regional restrictions based on local case counts and/or hospitalizations.
- One owner confirmed that they would likely shut their business down this week. They do have outside capabilities, but the reduced capacity limits make the business unsustainable for the foreseeable future.
 - This particular business was not open this morning when they usually would be.
- Another business not on the call, but confirmed otherwise, has shut down operations. The owners' comments suggest that it became more cost effective for her to close operations vs. trying to continue with them. This is a smaller footprint facility in business for more than 30 years in the community. She now worries about her abilities to pay severance and other such costs.
- Other businesses indicate ongoing frustrations surrounding the 'David and Goliath' concept where the 'David's' simply cannot compete with the 'Goliath's' thus they are pushed aside as are their employees.
 - It should be noted that such cases do not support local economies but rather they send local money out of the Country, or at minimum, out of the community.
- Another business pointed out that even though they have made TOAD attempts they are simply not geared for that style of business and they continue to suffer. Conversely, and this is important to recognize, the 'Fast-Food' facilities can and have switched quickly and effectively, often due to corporate support.
 - It should be noted that our investigation with local business confirms that the Fast-Food environments are doing 'okay' and in some cases are exceeding best expectations.
 - Do we want a restaurant environment that only includes Fast-Food products?
 - Do we recognize the potential health impacts faced down the road with such limited food options?
 - I should point out that the Fast-food businesses are also struggling with Human Resources so even though their sales and ability to navigate the challenges are okay, they are faced with other risks to their business operations.
- One owner cited the restrictions on patios suggesting that even though their patio could be operational, and is outside, they believe that the wording of the order implies that their patio may not be compliant. Because of that they have yet to open it.
 - The order is vague on what is and what isn't permitted from the 'patio' perspective.
- Another local restaurant that is operating outside can only fit in three tables due to the physical distancing rules. Said operation can then manage a maximum of 12 people at any given time vs. their typical 70+ (including inside). They also confirm that due to the family restrictions they are usually serving a maximum of 6 people thus less than 10% of normal operations.
- Another business on the call that is at a very high risk of failure commented earlier that in order to get into the TOAD world they had to purchase far more take-out supplies than they would need. This due to minimum order requirements.
 - This same business also mentioned the reality of now contributing to more use of 'Single Use Plastics' than they are comfortable with.

- AVCOC is very concerned with this new reality as it is clear that we are now adding to vs. reducing our environmental impacts.

These are just some of the comments and observations that we've heard. From our own standpoint we'd like to ask for more clarity on the Patio restrictions (what is, and what isn't allowed), we'd like for the PHO to reconsider inside dining especially in smaller, easier to control communities, and we'd like some certainty on when our businesses can expect to reopen their doors. We also ask that the Government allocate significantly more funding to the food/beverage industry.

Please know that without more clarity, and without more flexibility, the restaurant industry will likely collapse in British Columbia. With that, thousands of jobs will be lost, and unfortunately many of those jobs are held by people who pre-pandemic were hanging on to a thread. It's worse now, far worse.

Thank you in advance for a response that addresses our questions and provides more certainty for all.

Yours truly,
ALBERNI VALLEY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Bill Collette
CEO

Cc: Dr. Bonnie Henry – Provincial Health Officer
AVCOC – Board of Directors