

August 26, 2020

Dear Prime Minister and Ministers Freeland, Ng, Hussen, McKenna, Joly, and Monsef,

Re: Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA) Program

Main street businesses and downtowns across Canada continue to struggle through the impacts of COVID-19. Our communities and local economies, which are built upon the foundation created by neighbourhood-serving businesses, are suffering. And faced with constant change and uncertainty, our business owners are continuously revising their plans for survival and recovery, granted they've been fortunate enough to keep their doors open up to this point.

Some of these businesses have benefitted from the government financial support programs put in place, however, many have not. We appreciate the work you and respective teams continue to do in the face of this pandemic to support the economy and our businesses, but we must immediately address the shortcomings of the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA) program.

On April 29th, IDA Canada wrote you to suggest some essential changes to the CECRA Program. It is now four months later and with minimal program uptake, we are writing you to reinforce the need to amend CECRA or enhance CEBA:

- Many small businesses have wanted to take advantage of CECRA, however, due to the complexities and bureaucracy of the program, have not been able to. We have been hearing from both commercial property owners and business owners that the program needs to be amended to provide a mechanism for business owners to apply for the funding, in the case that their landlord is unable or unwilling.
- The 70% threshold of this program is making it difficult for many of our businesses to apply. We request that this threshold be reduced to 30% to ensure as many businesses as possible are eligible for assistance.
- Furthermore, in the absence of any changes to the CECRA program, we strongly propose that the Federal government amend the current CEBA program to bolster the funding directly available to businesses. Increasing the loan amount available, along with the forgivable portion to 50% will help businesses to pay their mounting operating expenses, including rent, after months of little to no revenue.

Business Improvement Areas of British Columbia (BIABC), is a partner and member of IDA Canada and has also brought these recommendations forward a number of times. BIABC is the provincial umbrella organization representing more than 60 business districts across B.C. Collectively, this constitutes hundreds of thousands of retail, service and office employees – mostly small and medium-sized businesses – the backbone of B.C.'s economy. Since its inception in 1991, BIABC has been committed to championing strong, vibrant and successful downtowns, main streets and commercial districts across the province.

Collectively with the other member organizations of IDA Canada we represent those commercial neighbourhoods in every community which have employed millions of people and which represent the central meeting place for communities – economically, socially and culturally. We stand ready to work with all in the implementation of programs which address our current situation and those that will enable and enhance recovery.

Yours Sincerely,



Teri Smith
President, BIABC

IDA Canada, a national coalition of the International Downtown Association, represents organizations across the country that manage Canada's business districts, making them vital places in the nation's identity and key centres of economic wealth and social and cultural growth. The National Network of IDA Canada has been created to provide a single voice for business district professionals while sharing best practices, experiences, and the tools to create more vibrant cores in our cities and towns. For more information: www.downtown.org/ida-canada/.