

December 10, 2020

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Premier's Office
Room 281, Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1A1

Re: COVID-19: Response Framework Modification Recommendations

Repercussions to the Foodservice Sector will occur unless additional funding relief is presented or modifications to Ontario's COVID-19 Response Framework are introduced immediately.

Dear Premier Doug Ford,

Since the COVID-19 pandemic came upon us, the hospitality industry has been devastated. Hospitality businesses were the first to experience the negative impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and will be the last to recover. The public health measures that are included in Ontario's COVID-19 Response Framework single out the restaurant industry and repercussions will occur unless additional funding relief is presented or modifications to the framework are introduced immediately. Outlined below is latest industry data that paints a picture of the critical business and employment concerns that the industry is facing as a direct result of COVID-19 as well as employment concerns.

Critical Business Concerns

The following statistics were sourced from a recent survey conducted by Restaurants Canada.

- **8 out of 10** restaurants are either losing money or barely surviving.
 - **65%** are continuing to operate at a loss, while **19%** are just breaking even.
 - **63%** of foodservice businesses that are losing money, expect to take at least one year to return to profitability
- **48%** of single-unit foodservice operators expect to permanently close their establishments within the six months unless conditions do not improve and **56%** of multi-unit operators stated that they expect to close at least one of their locations within the same time period.

Critical Employment Concerns

The following statistics were sourced from the November 2020 employment data by Statistics Canada

- According to the November 2020 employment statistical data, there are approximately **100,000** workers that have yet to return to their jobs in Ontario's hospitality sector and these numbers are expected to grow due to the framework restrictions during the busiest time of the year
 - These numbers represent close to **50%** of total jobs lost across all Ontario sectors and **40%** of all jobs within the hospitality sector in Canada

While other industries are progressively recovering, the restaurant sector revenues and employment numbers are declining.

The foodservice sector in the Province of Ontario is brutally underperforming in comparison to the other provinces as well as the national averages.

Restaurant Lockdowns and Restrictions

Hospitality owners, operators, managers and their front-line employees feel that restaurants are being wrongly singled out as an active source of the virus outbreaks. Health officials view restaurants as a forum for gatherings where people meet and the outbreaks transpire. Accessible data does not demonstrate the outcomes to be originating in the restaurant environment. **In fact, a recent report released by Science Table identifies only 7.1% of outbreaks originated in restaurants and bars.**

The Regions of Toronto and Peel have been in a state of lockdown since early October. As per the introduced guidelines and restrictions, the restaurants in these areas have been closed yet the virus outbreaks have been dramatically increasing. It is our belief that **closing the restaurants encourages private gatherings in non-controlled environments which is strongly contributing to the high outbreaks these regions are experiencing.**

The restaurants operate in a strictly regulated and controlled environment. The implementation of the customer tracking systems which is currently included in the safety protocols of any restaurant operation, enables the health unit officials to identify the contact tracing and resulting in more effective way to control and prevent the community spread.

Although our membership may not agree with the decision to close the restaurants, we understand that the provincial and municipal leaders need to take actions to control and decrease the number of the coronavirus cases. Our leaders, however, should re-evaluate the actions taken and the initiatives introduced when the existing evidence contradicts the decisions made and adjust or change them accordingly.

We are seeing much anguish in the regions of the Response Framework's Orange Restrict and Red Control zones. Restricting the indoor seating capacity to 50 and 10 people in these zones is not financially viable for those with much larger space configurations which also, in turn, have higher expenses. Larger indoor dining rooms are able to handle higher customer counts safely while following the 2-meter rule. A percentage (%) calculation related to the total licenced seating capacity similar to what has been used in other jurisdictions is a more appropriate method for meeting safety rules and fairly supporting the sustainability of a restaurant.

Furthermore, the current ending time of 9pm for serving alcoholic beverages for the establishments in the Orange and Red Zones, drastically limits restaurant's normal customer seating plan. Most restaurants have three dinner sittings starting at 5:30pm and are normally two hours long (5:30pm, 7:30pm, and 9:30pm). The current 9pm restriction discourages any reservations after 8:30pm, as it is typical to order a beverage with a meal, along with the fact that all guests must be gone from the establishments by 10pm. Expanding the time restriction by at least one hour to 10pm will allow the establishments to have that vital third sitting starting at 9:30pm.

In these struggling times every seat and every dollar being spent can make a difference in keeping the door open.

ORHMA's Recommendations to Modify the Province's COVID-19 Response Framework

- Open restaurants in lockdown areas as they operate with strict safety protocols in place including customer contact tracing.
- Recalculate the capacity rules for the Orange, Red, and Grey Zones to reflect a percentage (%) of total licensed capacity similar to what has been used in other jurisdictions which is more of an appropriate method for meeting safety rules and support the sustainability of a restaurant.
- Extend the current ending time of 9pm for serving alcoholic beverages for the establishments in the Orange and Red Zones to 10pm at the earliest, and the consumption from 10pm to 11pm to allow for the extra seating of customers.

I thank you for the work you have done and continue to do to ensure Ontarians are safe during this pandemic. I ask that you review and strongly consider the points made in this document in support of the Ontario's foodservice sector.

I would be greatly appreciative to schedule a meeting with you to discuss these recommendations further.

Thank you,



Tony Elenis
President & CEO
Ontario Restaurant Hotel & Motel Association (ORHMA)

cc. Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health, Christine.elliott@pc.ola.org
Hon. Lisa Macleod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, Lisa.macleodco@pc.ola.org
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