

Attorney General
McMurtry-Scott Building
720 Bay Street
11th Floor
Toronto ON M7A 2S9
Tel: 416-326-4000
Fax: 416-326-4007

Procureur général
Édifice McMurtry-Scott
720, rue Bay
11^e étage
Toronto ON M7A 2S9
Tél.: 416-326-4000
Télec.: 416-326-4007



Ontario

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Dear Head of Council:

We know that people, businesses and municipalities in Ontario have been significantly affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, including our hospitality sector and workers. Restaurants, bars and other licensed establishments like tap houses and breweries play an essential role in the success of local economies and the vibrancy of communities in our province. That is why our government is committed to supporting them, while doing all we can to keep people safe based on the guidance of public health experts.

Early on in this public health emergency the Attorney General led our government's swift action to allow licensed restaurants and bars to offer takeout and delivery of alcohol with food orders, to extend all liquor licenses for three months at no extra cost to licensees and to reduce the minimum price restaurants and bars are required to sell spirits at by 33 per cent.

Last fall Minister Sarkaria tabled the *Smarter for Business, Better for People Act* which, since passed, gives restaurants, bars and breweries the ability to allow dogs in outdoor eating areas, like patios and inside food premises where only pre-packaged and/or low risk foods are served. This change has provided more flexibility and business opportunities to the hospitality sector.

There is still more that can be done. Each of us have heard loud and clear the calls from municipalities and the hospitality sector to allow licensed establishments to extend their outdoor patio licenses for the duration of summer and into the fall. The current process is time-consuming and presents too many barriers for businesses already struggling to succeed in the face of COVID-19.

We are therefore pleased to inform you that, as the Minister responsible for the regulation of alcohol sale and consumption in Ontario, the Attorney General has implemented regulatory changes that give the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) the discretion to allow licensed establishments to temporarily add or increase the size of their patios once they are permitted to reopen. These opportunities will be available to all licensed establishments, whether or not they currently have a patio, and will be subject to any additional requirements set out by the AGCO and municipality (such as by-laws or other restrictions).

The Attorney General and Ministers of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Small Business and Red Tape Reduction recognize the need to give licensed establishments certainty as they prepare to operate their businesses safely, successfully and respectful of social distancing protocols. That is why we came together quickly to find an effective solution as Ontario gradually re-opens its economy.

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Additionally, we encourage you and your municipal council to look at the options available to support your Main Streets. A few innovative municipalities have considered extending patios onto sidewalks and into parking lots, allowing the alternative use of a section of downtown streets, or transforming public parks into food gardens. We encourage you to consider what may work in your community to support our small businesses.

We look forward to seeing the Ontario spirit in action as licensed establishments take advantage of this latest change and municipalities launch plans to further support their local hospitality sectors this summer while keeping their communities safe and following all public health guidance.

Sincerely,



Doug Downey
Attorney General



Steve Clark
Minister
Municipal Affairs and Housing



Prabmeet Sarkaria
Associate Minister
Small Business and
Red Tape Reduction