

June 5, 2020

The Honourable Rod Phillips
Minister of Finance
Frost Building South
7th Floor, 7 Queen's Park Cres.
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y7

RE: Patio liquor licenses in Ontario

Dear Minister Phillips,

Thank you for your continued leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the situation evolves, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) is receiving concerns from the business community and communicating them to all levels of government.

To begin, we appreciate the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario's (AGCO) decision to allow consumers to order beverage alcohol from restaurants and bars with their food takeout and delivery orders between 9am and 11pm. However, I am writing this letter to express the concerns from our members regarding the upcoming patio season in Ontario.

Given the challenges and uncertainties that emerged for restaurants and bars because of the pandemic, many businesses put off applying for a liquor license to serve alcohol on their patio during the summer. However, it takes between 90 and 120 days to receive a liquor license through the AGCO. Consequently, restaurants and bars who begin the application today could receive their liquor license in September and at the end of patio season.

Additionally, given the need to implement physical distancing, municipalities across Ontario are currently developing regulations to allow restaurants and bars to expand their patios into parking lots and sidewalks. This would enable these establishments to expand into public spaces and facilitate social distancing among patrons. In order for this flexibility to be granted, a new or updated AGCO permit may be required, as the new floor plan and set up would require approval.

With these two scenarios in mind, the Government of Ontario should ensure that the AGCO has the resources/staff needed to expedite the approval process for restaurants and bars looking to obtain a seasonal liquor license and those who currently have a liquor license but need to expand to facilitate social distancing.

This recommendation would ensure that restaurants and bars can open their patios quickly this summer and begin to recover from the financial hardship caused by the pandemic. As restaurants and bars re-open, this will also help support the tourism industry more broadly.

Public health and safety are priorities for all Ontario businesses. We will continue to monitor and assess new developments pertaining to COVID-19 closely and work with our members, partners, and all levels of government to provide support to Ontario business.

Sincerely,



Rocco Rossi
President and CEO
Ontario Chamber of Commerce

CC: The Honourable Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
The Honourable Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries