



The Muttart Foundation

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By e-mail

Hon. Jason Kenney
Premier of Alberta
Edmonton Alberta

Dear Mr. Premier:

We join with you and your colleagues, and most Albertans, in a desire to contain transmission of COVID-19 as early and as effectively as possible. The impact of this virus on Alberta is already apparent and is only likely to grow. We commend your government for relying heavily on the advice of the medical experts who are dealing with this situation, and we are gratified to see so many Albertans responding positively to the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

We also commend the province for announcing plans to deal with the economic impact of COVID-19 on the people and organizations of our province. We recognize the difficulties of such planning when events outside the province are already having such a drastic impact on the province's revenue.

Our hope is that when you and your colleagues are developing the economic assistance program, you will specifically address and include assistance to the charities of the province who are affected as much as, if not more than, other types of entities. The announcement today of a \$60-million infusion into the FCSS program to support front-line organizations and shelters is most welcome, but those are not the only charities that will be affected.

As you noted in one of your recent news conferences, a public emergency such as this increases the demand for services from Alberta charities. We already have seen charities seeking to increase these services while respecting the limitations imposed or recommended by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. In other cases, respecting those limitations has forced some charities to cancel events or postpone them indefinitely.

The impact of these steps on charities is going to be massive and, of course, there is no ability on the part of charities to hope that they can recover lost revenues through higher fees when the crisis passes.

Arts organizations are cancelling events, creating a significant deficit in their budgets. Charities of all kinds who rely on fees for service are having to reduce their revenue expectations because of the need to limit the number of clients they can see. Organizations such as food banks can expect large increases in the demands for their services with no corresponding ability to increase revenue. We can anticipate that at least in the short term, charitable donations will decrease as people turn their minds to their personal situations. We are approaching one of the busiest times of the year for fundraising events and they all, of course, must be cancelled. The cancellation of casinos – fully understandable and justified – is a further significant financial “hit” on those charities who were anticipating those revenues.

Some impacts may not be as direct, but still have the potential to be highly problematic. For example, the closure of child-care centres may well result in some staff having to seek out other types of work. Replacing them once the crisis passes will be a monumental challenge and, if not successful, could result in a reduction in the number of children who can be served. This assumes that the facilities will even be able to survive; as with other businesses and organizations, their obligations to pay for rent and utilities do not cease while their doors are closed.

You are, Premier, well aware of the statistics:

- more than 26,200 non-profit organizations in Alberta
- charities (a subset of non-profits) employ more than 200,000 people full-time and another 230,000 part-time
- total expenditures by charities on employment exceed \$18 billion, about half of the \$33 billion they expend each year.

Charities and non-profits constitute an important part of the Alberta economy. And, just like businesses, they are hurting. Just like businesses, those that close are giving up revenue, yet face continued expenses for facilities and, wherever possible, to continue staff positions. But their importance, as you have stressed so often, goes well beyond the economic – they support and seek to improve the quality of life of all Albertans, often at times of great vulnerability.

We don't dispute that Alberta's businesses are going to need help. But so, too, do the charities and nonprofits that find themselves in identical situations.

Our Board of Directors is considering what emergency assistance we can provide in the short term and medium term, but our resources pale in comparison to the demand we anticipate.

You are aware, from your time as a member of the federal Cabinet, that a long-standing request of the voluntary sector has been for equal access to programs and services available to businesses. The need for such steps is made even more evident in our current situation.

We hope that the needs of Alberta's charities will be included in your considerations as you prepare the assistance program you have promised. Please bear in mind that the needs of Albertans for services from charities will continue long past the current crisis. We need to ensure that those organizations can survive to provide those services.

We would be happy to work with your officials and to provide whatever information and assistance we can as you develop the province's responses to the pandemic.

In the interim, we wish, for you and your colleagues, the strength and wisdom to provide leadership in what is an unprecedented challenge not only for our province and our country, but for the entire world.

Yours truly

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Wyatt', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Bob Wyatt
Executive Director

cc: Hon. Travis Toews, Minister of Finance
Hon. Rajan Sawhney, Minister of Community and Social Services
Hon. Leela Aheer, Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women
Hon. Rebecca Shulz, Minister of Children's Services
Rachel Notley, MLA, Leader of the Opposition