

June 15, 2026

The Honourable Nina Tangri
Minister of Small Business
Legislative Assembly of Ontario
Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A2

Re: Ontario's Small Businesses Need Provincial Action on Vibrant Downtowns

Dear Minister Tangri,

I am writing on behalf of the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA), the provincial network representing over 300 BIAs and more than 140,000 small businesses across Ontario. As the Minister responsible for small business in this province, you represent the constituency that sits at the very heart of our mandate - and we are writing today because we believe you are uniquely positioned to ensure Ontario's small businesses are not left behind in a critical national conversation.

In June 2026, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Big City Mayors' Caucus (BCMC) released its Vibrant Downtowns initiative, calling for coordinated action across all orders of government on homelessness and housing, organized crime and public safety, and transit and infrastructure. The initiative frames vibrant downtowns as essential to Canada's economic competitiveness and investor confidence. OBIAA strongly agrees - and we would add that it is Ontario's small businesses, operating on those streets every day, that are both the most directly affected by downtown decline and the most powerful drivers of downtown recovery. A provincial response to this initiative that does not explicitly include the small business sector will miss its most important constituency.

What Ontario's Small Businesses Are Absorbing

OBIAA's member BIAs are on the ground in Ontario's commercial districts every day. What they are reporting is consistent across the province and maps directly onto the BCMC's three priority areas:

- **Homelessness and housing instability** are reducing foot traffic and customer confidence in commercial districts and deterring the investment that small businesses depend on to grow. Small business owners are absorbing the human and reputational costs of a housing and mental health system failure they did not create.
- **Organized crime, extortion, and retail theft** are increasing operating costs and in some cases forcing closures. These are not isolated incidents - they are a systemic pressure on Ontario's small business sector that requires provincial enforcement strategy and resources, not individual business owners installing cameras and absorbing losses alone.

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- **Aging infrastructure and transit gaps** are reducing access to commercial districts and limiting the foot traffic that keeps Main Street businesses viable. For small businesses in communities without strong transit alternatives, this is an existential concern - not a quality-of-life issue.

What We Are Asking of Your Ministry

Ontario's small business community needs its provincial ministry to be a strong internal voice for the sector as the Province responds to the BCMC's initiative and the federal budget commitments that follow. We respectfully ask that you:

- **Champion a small business lens** within provincial cabinet as Ontario aligns its response to the BCMC's Vibrant Downtowns priorities - ensuring that homelessness response, organized crime strategy, and infrastructure investment are evaluated for their impact on Ontario's small businesses and not only on municipalities.
- **Develop or expand targeted provincial supports** for small businesses operating under the pressures the BCMC has identified - including crime prevention and extortion response resources, business continuity supports for those directly impacted by downtown instability, and access to capital for businesses investing in their commercial corridors.
- **Ensure small businesses and BIAs have a seat at provincial planning tables** related to downtown recovery, housing, public safety, and infrastructure investment - so that provincial programs are shaped by the people who experience their impact daily, not only by the governments that deliver them.

Ontario's small businesses are not a downstream beneficiary of vibrant downtowns - they are a primary cause of them. When they thrive, their streets thrive. When they struggle, no amount of streetscaping or programming will fill the gap. The BCMC has started an important national conversation. We ask that your Ministry ensure Ontario's small business sector is at the table as the Province responds.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you or your staff at your convenience. I can be reached at rachel@obiaa.com or 647-521-5341.

Sincerely,



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