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Open letter to Premier Pallister from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, Manitoba Restaurants & Food Service Association, Restaurants Canada, and Retail Council of Canada

May 27, 2020

Hon. Brian Pallister
Premier of Manitoba
204 Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Urgent: Moratorium on commercial tenant evictions

Dear Premier Pallister:

With June 1st only days away, pressure is once again mounting for our small-and medium-sized business members to make their rent payments. Business owners have been telling us they are stressed about being evicted and urgently need government assistance.

We appreciate that your government is facing many unexpected challenges during this health and economic crisis of unprecedented proportions. Statistics Canada's April 2020 jobs report alone shows the extent of COVID-19's economic destruction in Manitoba to date on sectors such as accommodation, food services, wholesale and/or retail trade. While Manitobans have benefited from various income supports (CERB, CEWS, residential eviction ban...), many commercial tenants fall through the gaps.

Businesses across the province were heartened by the announcement of a federal-provincial program to provide much-needed rent relief. However, since the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA) program was announced, we have been hearing from numerous small-and medium-sized businesses that many improvements are desperately needed to make it work.

Even though the program just officially started today in Manitoba, we already know from our members that many landlords will not apply, meaning that their tenants will not be able to access the program and the commercial tenant eviction protection it includes. In fact, according to CFIB's Your Business and COVID-19 Survey Number Ten, conducted between May 15 and May 21, only 3 per cent of Manitoba commercial landlords surveyed answered definitively that they would be participating in the CECRA program with their tenants. In an RCC member survey 48% of RCC members indicated they have not been able to pay their rent at all while 34% indicated that landlords had threatened to either change their locks or evict them as a tenant.

Businesses that were forced to close entirely by government order to help stop the spread of COVID-19 have been generating zero revenues. Businesses like restaurants or retailers in malls that were forced to restrict their operations by government order have seen unsustainable revenue declines. The businesses who have managed to survive and are allowed to fully open will take time to get to the new normal, regardless of Manitoba's reopening timelines for Phase II and beyond. In the meantime, bills like rent payments continue to pile up, and evictions will become the norm.

We are urgently asking you to protect small-and medium-sized businesses from evictions by taking the following action:

- **Put in place temporary commercial eviction protection for tenants who were in good standing with their landlords prior to the COVID-19 pandemic through either temporary legislative change, or any alternative means until August 31, 2020, to match the end of the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA) program.**

Please help our business members make it to the other side of COVID-19. Without your immediate assistance, more businesses will be forced to close permanently. In the absence of sufficient support, a large portion of the economy and the jobs created by our hard-working members will disappear forever.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We appreciate your continued collaboration with Manitoba's business community, and your leadership and efforts to fight COVID-19. We look forward to your timely response and remain ready to work with you and your government to ensure Manitoba's small-and medium-sized businesses survive the prolonged health and economic impacts of COVID-19.

Sincerely,

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cc: Hon. Ralph Eichler, Minister of Economic Development and Training
Hon. Scott Fielding, Minister of Finance
Hon. Cliff Cullen, Minister of Justice and Attorney General