

March 31, 2020

Honourable Mike Farnworth
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
Room 128 Parliament Building
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Honourable Mike Farnworth,

I am writing on behalf of Business Improvement Areas of British Columbia (BIABC), the provincial umbrella organization representing more than 60 business districts across B.C., which constitutes hundreds of thousands of retail, service and office employees – mostly small and medium-sized businesses – the backbone of B.C.'s economy. We would like to express our growing concern around the safety and security of businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to address this issue with appropriate support for businesses and law enforcement.

As businesses continue to close their doors in support of the public interest and upholding social distancing requirements to slow the spread of COVID-19, our downtowns and commercial high streets are being left vacant and thus increasingly vulnerable to property crime. Fewer eyes and ears on our streets, coupled with the local drug supply shortage due to the border closure, has created a breeding ground for prolific property crime offenders.

Statistics from the Vancouver Police Department have indicated an increase in reported commercial break and enters. During the two week period from March 1 to 15, 2020, there were 86 reported incidents, and in the one week period following (March 16 to 24), there were already 81 reported incidents. Downtown Victoria is experiencing a similar trend, as the local police department confirms a spike in commercial break and enters, as well as smash and grabs within the past week.

Many BIA's are responding by requesting additional police resources, contracting security companies to provide overnight patrol services, as well as providing businesses with important crime prevention information to help deter criminal activity during this time. There has also been support from some BIAs for implementation of a safe drug supply program. Businesses, on the other hand, in an effort to protect their property and/or merchandise, have begun papering or boarding up their storefronts.

Our once vibrant commercial districts are quickly becoming boarded up ghost towns.

These times have proven challenging enough for businesses across our province, as they are simply struggling to survive and do not need the added stress and expense associated with property crime.

In light of this, we are seeking support and additional resources from the government to help address this growing problem before it escalates even further, including additional personal protective equipment for police officers across B.C., who are also on the front lines of this pandemic. BIABC is committed to working with your government to discuss this matter and to develop effective solutions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Teri Smith". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name and title.

Teri Smith
President, BIABC

Cc: Premier John Horgan, Province of BC
Honourable David Eby, Attorney General
Honourable Judy Darcy, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions