The Impacts of COVID-19 on the Tourism Sector (Summer Camps)

Presented to: Ontario's Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

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Due to COVID-19, summer camps have to remain closed for the 2020 season resulting in a loss of an entire year of revenue. We are are recommending:

1. An extension to the wage subsidy
2. Government funding to cover 40% of revenue losses incurred by summer camps

Summer camps are a haven for many people throughout Ontario. Not only are children and teenagers given the opportunity to live, learn and thrive in supportive environments, they have the chance to find out who they are, who they wish to become, how they fit into the world around them, and how to make that world a better place for everyone. Staff members also experience growth while leading and helping to shape the campers with whom they work. The memories and friendships that develop from one summer at camp last a lifetime.

Camps are a unique sector of the tourism industry where our entire annual revenue is garnered in the short months of the Ontario summer. With overnight summer camps closed this summer, we have lost all of our revenue for the entire 2020 season. Unlike many camps, we chose to retain all of our full-time year-round staff without decreasing their hours or salary and kept their benefits package intact. Our father, who founded Camp Kodiak, followed a business model that ensured that a “rainy day fund” was grown to help manage unforeseen circumstances. This rainy day fund, plus the government supports we have already received, will help to see us through the economic hardships of the global pandemic.

Recovering from a loss of total revenue will not be easy, nor will it be done in a year. Expenses related to owning and operating a summer camp require financial investments every month of the year, not just in the summer. We begin spending money to prepare for the coming summer from the moment that the buses leave the camp property. Maintaining properties and equipment result in large expenses. Purchasing new items and materials continue throughout the off-season in preparation for the arrival of counsellors and campers, as do advertising, staff and camper recruitment expenses, professional fees (such as bookkeeping, accounting, legal fees), utilities, and more.

Some camps will never recover and will be forced to shutter their cabin/tent doors for ever. Other camps, such as ourselves, will weather this storm but will be faced with much uncertainty as we try to plan for the following summer. Will we be able to open next summer? Will we need to make dramatic and costly changes to our sleeping cabins and dining hall? What facilities and protocols will need to be implemented to provide a safe and fun experience for campers and staff members? Will we need to reduce the number of campers we can accept? Will parents be able to afford to send their child to camp?

The time has come for the government to consider the unique financial needs of the summer camp industry as it relates to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While wage subsidies are helpful at the moment, they will run out long before registration fees begin to be collected for the 2020 camp season. A full-year wage subsidy would alleviate a lot of financial stress from the owners and providers of summer camps. As well, a grant to provide summer camps with funds to cover 40% of their losses would allow camps to sustain enough cash flow to prepare for and deliver camp in 2020.

I implore the government to consider the importance of helping summer camps at this unprecedented time in history to help our children and teenagers to gain the skills, independence and confidence to become the leaders of tomorrow.