

Hello Member of Provincial Parliament Lindo,

I hope all is well with you. My name is Gabriel Araujo and I am a small business owner in Kitchener, ON.

In August of 2019, I decided to incorporate a business called Learn2master Academy to offer Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, Kickboxing and Fitness training, to people of all ages. Our goal was to secure an appropriate facility that would accommodate our other project which is a Kids Recreational Afterschool/Summer camp program in order to better serve our community with our skillset and experience. Having kids myself, it was very hard to find meaningful programming in the region for school aged children that met their physical and mental needs. In November of 2019, after a successful few months of acquiring students and building relationships, I leased a 3300 sq.ft. facility in Kitchener, ON, on the corner of Stirling and Courtland Av.

We began the process to get architectural/engineering drawings, building permits, and our business license, and on March 1, 2020 were able to open our doors officially only to have to close them 2 weeks later due to the Covid19 state of emergency in Ontario.

Because we are a relatively new small business we did not qualify for any financial aid from the government given the rules around payroll and/or showing revenue decline (how can you decline below 0?).

We then applied on June 17th, 2020, for the Ontario Regional Relief and Recovery fund as other similar businesses were able to access this program. Today, I attempted to check on the status of my application and was met by a rather cold reality that they were unwilling to even check whether my application has been or will be reviewed. The response from the agent was blunt: you'll get an email if/when someone reviews your application. With mounting bills and pressure from my landlord to pay the monthly \$5800 of rent (HST included) and a slow re-start for businesses like mine, time is of the essence to prevent us from going bankrupt and losing everything we have worked so hard for, especially before we are able to truly help our community and our members. To add further insult to injury, on August 24th we received a response from the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario declining our application for relief. No criteria was provided. I personally called the agency and the agent simply told me that no specific criteria would be provided. This seems suspicious because one of the reasons that the agent threw around in conversation (without looking at our file) was that we may have been declined because we haven't been around for over 2 years. The agency is using these criteria to assess business viability. If the fund is here to help businesses struggling with Covid 19 shutdowns, how does this make any sense? Also, it is not a criteria according to the program guidelines, and as such, should not be how a business is deemed viable or not. We continue to fall through the government aid cracks and it seems more likely to me that select businesses are able to receive funds, while others are left to fail.

Our business depends in large part (approx. half of our revenue) on our afterschool program and summer camps, so it is essential for our survival that we can make it to September in financial shape to ramp up. Covid 19 regulations, while necessary, have hindered our ability to take on the amount of people we need to pay our bills and the rent. We are a viable business, and in 2 weeks since reopening have acquired over 20 members to join our gym.

Is there anything that you or your office are able to do in order to help us or guide us in the right direction? I would love to be able to show you and your team what we have built for our community sometime.

Thank you very much in advance.

Cheers,

Gabriel Araujo
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