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March 24, 2021

The Rt. Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister
The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister
The Honourable William Blair, Minister of Public Safety

By email

Dear Prime Minister, Minister Freeland and Minister Blair,

Re: Exemption or variation from the rule banning non-essential travel for US citizens who own property in Canada

We are writing to request that the Government provide an exemption or variation from the rule banning non-essential travel for Americans who are seasonal residents and who own residential property in Canada. This change is needed if the border still remains closed to non-essential travel in May. We believe there is a clear justification and rationale for such an exemption, and that it would present minimal or no risk to Canadians.

American citizens who are residential property owners and taxpayers in Canada have been unable to get to their properties for over a year now, due to the border closure policies. Most are seasonal residents of Canada who come to summer homes, mainly in the months of June through September.

The Georgian Bay Association (GBA) is an umbrella organization for 18 community associations along the east and north shores of Georgian Bay, representing around 3,000 families. We have been advocating on behalf of our land-owning members for over 100 years and estimate that we reach around 18,000 residents of the Georgian Bay. Our mandate is to work with our water-based communities and other stakeholders to ensure the careful stewardship of the greater Georgian Bay environment. Approximately 22% of our membership, or 670 families, are US citizens.

In support of the above request for an exemption or variation from the rule banning non-essential travel for this group of Americans, we note the following:

- Requests from US political leaders and business interests on both sides of the border for a relaxation of the rules for specific purposes have been mounting recently. Many are advocating for developing a plan for a phased re-opening of the border. The exemption we are requesting could form part of such a phased re-opening, starting with low-risk travel.
- The vaccination program in the US has rolled out quickly, and it is expected that Americans who want to be vaccinated will be inoculated by May. Therefore, the risk posed to Canadians by US visitors who show proof of vaccination and a negative COVID-19 test is low.
- The new US administration has adopted a responsible, science-based approach to addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, similar to the Canadian strategy, which should make harmonizing policy on border opening easier to achieve.

Accordingly, we believe it would be justifiable for the Government to allow American residential property owners to visit their properties in Canada, provided that the protocols in place to control the spread of COVID-19 are observed. These could include:

- applying safe procedures at the border and observance of social distancing;
- providing proof of ownership at the border, together with proof of vaccination and a negative COVID-19 test;
- entry to Canada at the nearest point to their property;
- agreement to proceed immediately to their property without stopping for supplies and staying there for the requisite isolation period (if still in place); and
- on arrival, compliance with any other COVID-19 risk management requirements that are then in place in the relevant province.

Please note that the American members of GBA present a particularly low level of risk of COVID-19 spread for Canadians because:

- they would be travelling by car and can easily bring with them sufficient supplies to self-isolate for 14 days; and
- their properties are all remote so self-isolation would present no logistical challenges.

Current border policies already acknowledge that there are different groups of individuals who present different degrees of risk and have a particular need to cross the US-Canada border, including immediate family members, healthcare workers, commercial drivers, etc. The primary goal of current border restrictions is to reduce unnecessary tourist and shopping traffic, given that these travellers pose the greatest public health concerns and their travel is discretionary.

Our American members and their immediate families have only one objective and that is to get to their properties, check them for winter damage (two winters now), and carry out the repairs and maintenance that will be needed. They would not use high-risk services or widely circulate in communities, and so are in a different risk category than tourists and shoppers. Furthermore, their visit could be viewed as something other than discretionary, given that many are facing the cancellation of their cottage insurance due to lack of occupancy.

While the GBA recognizes that our border policy should be guided primarily by health and safety concerns, we also note that our US cottagers are not just taxpayers, but for over a century have been active contributors to the economic, cultural, historical and environmental life of Georgian Bay. Today, the investments they make in their properties are critically important to our local businesses and, as well, US citizens are key players in, and contributors to, local organizations that work to promote the environmental sustainability of Georgian Bay. We also suggest that there is a compassionate reason to consider allowing an exception for these families that have strong ties to Canada and reside here on a seasonal basis, similar to the policy that allows families to be reunited. In some cases, US cottagers have a Canadian spouse, who can go to the family seasonal residence, but they are still unable to visit.

GBA supports and agrees with the general policy of limiting and discouraging travel at this time as a public health measure, with appropriate exceptions being granted. We understand that the Government would need to determine the appropriate timing for introducing an exception for American property owners based on the medical experts' reading of the data and level of risk present in Canada and adjacent American states.

However, we hope that you are able to give this matter due consideration as part of your border opening strategy utilizing science-based risk analysis. Under such a strategy it would be logical to allow entry for those posing the lowest risk, such as US property owners who comply with the above requirements. It is important to consider this issue soon so that a decision may be made in time for the summer season, which generally starts in early June.

We would be grateful for an opportunity to discuss the issue further at your convenience.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rupert Kindersley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Rupert Kindersley
Executive Director