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June 22, 2020

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: Exception to Covid-19 US border closure for property owners in Canada

We commend you on your government's handling of the COVID-19 crisis and your leadership in steering Canada and its people through this very difficult period for all. We note that the government recently took the compassionate step of partially opening the US border to allow immediate family members to be reunited, and we support a careful, staged reopening of the border for specific purposes, where there is a clear justification and rationale with minimal risk.

We therefore respectfully ask you to consider the current position of US citizens who are property owners and taxpayers in Canada, but who are currently unable to get to their properties under the current border closure policy.

The Georgian Bay Association (GBA) is an umbrella organization for 19 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.

We believe it would be justifiable for the Government to consider an exception from the border closure allowing American property owners who do not hold Canadian passports to visit their properties in Canada, provided that the protocols in place to control the spread of COVID-19 are observed. Those include: applying safe procedures at the border and observance of social distancing; self-isolation and compliance with quarantine requirements on arrival; and all other relevant COVID-19 risk management requirements. Reciprocal arrangements could also be considered for Canadian property owners in the US.

We believe that visits by our American members should present a low level of risk because they generally cross into Canada at a point close to their seasonal residence, so compliance with requirements to qualify for permission to enter Canada would be straightforward, as would bringing with them sufficient supplies to self-isolate for 14 days. Their properties are all remote so self-isolation would present no logistical challenges, thus presenting very minimal risk of COVID-19 transfer to Canadians.

Current border policies already acknowledge that there are different groups of individuals who present different degrees of both risk and need/benefit to cross the US-Canadian border, including immediate family members, healthcare workers, commerce drivers, etc. The primary goal of current border restrictions is to reduce unnecessary tourist and shopping traffic, given that these travellers place unnecessary exposure on operations that pose the greatest public health concerns, such as hotels, restaurants, buses, trains, coaches and tourist destinations. Our US members and their immediate families have only one objective and that is to get to their properties in their own cars and boats. They would not utilize any of these high-risk services, and so are in a different risk category than tourists and shoppers.

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 (and vice versa for Canadian families with strong ties to the US), similar to the policy that allows families to be reunited.

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.

We hope that you are able to give this matter due consideration and 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