**ACTA talking points for discussion with MPs – updated as at May 26, 2021**

*Please be sure to include your* ***own story*** *about how the pandemic has affected you and your business personally. It is important MPs understand the impact with concrete examples. For those that are having a video meeting with an MP and using ACTA’s prepared PowerPoint deck, the talking points have been structured that you can follow along with the slides.*

(SLIDE 1)

* Hello
* I am a: (*Travel Agency owner, Travel Agent, Independent Travel Agent*)
* I desperately need to explain to you (*my Travel Agency –or why* I) --and our industry-- needs government help now.

(SLIDE 2) – The Canadian Travel Agency & Travel Agent

* Pre-COVID-19, we were an industry of 14,000 **Travel Agency Businesses** including approximately 4,000 storefront locations and 10,000 self-employed independent travel agents (home based businesses)
* There has been a loss of over 800 storefront locations, or 19%, from March 2020 to March 2021
* Of the 24,000 **Travel Agents and Independent Travel Agents**, more than **75%** of us are women.
* **90%** of travel agents are on EI or CRB right now and there is no indication our colleagues/myself can return to the work we have committed our careers too.
* What once was a $30 billion dollar industry, we have now been now working in a negative cash flow position for the past year.

(SLIDE 3) – Restrictions and Impact

* We understand the importance of protecting the health of Canadians, especially in light of the new more infectious variants and the surge in cases while we are in Wave 3.
* We appreciate that the financial aid programs were extended to the September, however with travel bans still in place, we CANNOT survive with the government’s scheduled decline in the aid programs beginning in July.
* Independent travel agents will see their much needed support drop significantly and this will force employers to lay-off more employees.
* The government still has not released a RoadMap to Recovery…. A plan for the safe restart of travel.
* **We desperately need a plan so that WE can plan.**
  + With no recovery plan, it is difficult to provide financial projections to financial institutions in order to secure liquidity,
  + With no recovery plan, we do not have information to share with Canadians who anxiously wait to travel to see family and friends.
  + With no recovery plan, we do not know when we can bring back staff, yet our industry is **expected to process** **government-mandated consumer refunds with no revenue coming in**
* Travel agents typically only receive payment after a customer has travelled so with only limited domestic (possibly day trips or provincial stay-cations) expected for this summer at most, the financial situation for Canadian travel agencies (travel agents and independent travel agents) is **critical.**

(SLIDES 4, 5, and 6) – My Ask, our Need

Results from an ACTA survey conducted last month showed 75% of travel businesses will not survive to the end of 2021 without financial aid at the current maximum level.

* Travel Agencies and Travel Agents are asking for expanded and extended **sector specific aid**

*(Feel free to edit based on YOUR priorities or situation)*

1. **Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS)**

The CEWS program has been a lifeline to travel agencies, however with ongoing travel restrictions, it is vital that this program continues to the end of year and 90 days after travel restrictions are eased. With the government’s proposed sliding scale that begins in July, this DOES NOT help our industry. **ACTA urges the government to increase the wage subsidy to at minimum the current rate of 75% for hardest hit businesses that include travel agencies.**

1. **Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS)**

Travel agencies need access to the maximum 90% subsidy regardless of whether they are located in a jurisdiction mandated to be closed by a public health authority. The federal and provincial governments are declaring that Canadians should not travel and should cancel any bookings and therefore, travel agencies must be eligible for the additional 25% top-up of this program. **The program must also be extended to the end of 2021 and until 90 days after travel restrictions are eased.**

1. **Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB)**

Almost half of the travel agents in Canada are self-employed, independent travel agents who are reliant on the CRB program. Many of these independent travel agents are women who have chosen this career knowing it provides flexibility to work and to raise a family. Our recovery however, will lag behind any other industry and with the delay on when travel agents are paid, we need **CRB to be extended at the current level to the end of 2021, and 90 days after travel restrictions are** **eased.**

1. **Employment Insurance (EI)**

With travel restrictions still in place and no revenue coming in, my employer is not able to bring me back to work. If the government released a Roadmap to Recovery, it would help my employer know when this date might be possible. The new Canada Recovery Hiring Benefit (CRHB) program could also help my employer but without knowing the plan for the safe restart of travel, and the fact that our industry is still down greater than 95% in revenue, right now, the new benefit program will not help my employer. **We urge the government to extend the EI benefit program until the end of 2021 and 90 days after travel restrictions are eased.**

1. **Canada Recovery Hiring Benefit (CRHB)**

The new Canada Recovery Hiring Benefit (CRHB) program has been proposed to cover at most 50% of the difference between my payroll in a given month and my baseline payroll. Without knowing the plan for the safe restart of travel, and the fact that our industry is still down greater than 95% in revenue, right now, the will not help me. **We urge the government to extend the CRHB program until the end of 2021 and 90 days after travel restrictions are eased.**

1. **Government Aid for Commission Recall**

When the government announced that an agreement had been reached with the first of the airline financial relief packages, we were thrilled with the commitment that “travel agent commission would not be recalled for COVID-19 related cancellations”. Since then, our industry is still dealing with devastating unintended consequence of commission recall. Five areas or gaps have been identified that have significant impact to me and my business. These monies were already earned and used to pay fixed expenses. **We urge the government to work with ACTA and the industry to fully protect travel agent commissions as committed to by the government. This may require a separate Fund or special CEBA or HASCAP non-repayable loans in order so that my business can cover these government-mandated consumer refunds.**

An example of one of these gaps is with commissions already recalled, and will not be returned.

1. **Liquidity Programs (CEBA, RRRF, HASCAP)**

Many travel agent businesses were successful in receiving the **CEBA loan** in both the first and second round. The problem is that the pandemic has gone on for over 14 months and with revenue declines greater than 95%, it is not possible to repay the required amount by the end of December 2022 in order to be eligible for the forgivable portion. During this time, fixed expenses have remained, and with continued travel restrictions in place, **we need the CEBA loan to be**:

* enhanced,
* we need the repayment terms to be extended, and
* we need the forgivable portion to be expanded or increased in order to help me recover.

June 30th is the deadline when you can apply for most of the loan programs. This deadline is too soon for our industry. Travel agencies and travel agents are reluctant to amass more debt, especially without a government plan for the safe restart of travel. Therefore, **we urge the government to extend the deadline for all loan applications to the end of 2021.**

With many of the loan programs, sole proprietors have not been able to access this funding, yet they still have fixed expenses in place. And with over 50% of independent travel agents being sole proprietors, this has placed a tremendous burden on an industry that is also challenged with the unique situation of Commission recall, where I have had to **return monies** I earned from 2019 and early 2020 as a result of cancelled COVID-19 bookings and government-mandated consumer refunds. **As a solution, we urge the government to expand the accessibility of all loan programs to sole proprietors.**

1. **Tourism Relief Fund**

Our industry has been advised, not to worry… that funding has been earmarked for Tourism, which will be there to support us. Yet, from what we see, how travel agents would fit into this program is unclear. We understand that the program is new and currently under development and so **we urge you and the government to ensure that travel agents do have access to this funding.**

(SLIDES 7) – How YOU can help our industry Survive

* We know from the all of the research and polling that consumers are anxious to start travelling but based on restrictions still in place, and when travel agents are paid, we will not see revenue until 2022.
* You have invested in travel agents and travel agencies for the past 15 months, don’t give up on us now.
* In order to ensure there is an industry left standing to assist Canadians when they can travel freely again, we need you to:
* **Speak** up in the **House of Commons** and ask that financial support programs be **extended** at the **maximum level** until the end of 2021
* **Speak** with the **Ministry of Finance** and those responsible for financial decisions, and to
* **Speak** with the **Ministry of Health** and those responsible for the travel restrictions and advisories to implement a **Roadmap to Recovery**.
* With continued maximum aid and a Roadmap to Recovery, we will be able to get back to providing Canadian travellers with personal and professional travel advice.
* **YOU** can make a difference and help your constituents and my business survive the economic impact of COVID-19.

(SLIDE 8) – Thank You!