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## RENT RELIEF CALLED 'TOO LITTLE TOO LATE'

REVAMPED FEDERAL  
PROGRAM CRITICIZED  
FOR MISSING KEY  
PANDEMIC MONTHS

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Laura Gyldenbjerg says she'll take the federal government's new COVID business rent subsidy, but it won't undo the damage of the past nine months.

"I think it's far too little too late for so many businesses," says Gyldenbjerg, an insolvency trustee who still works from her office in a strip plaza near the corner of Centennial Parkway and the South Service Road.

Unlike a much-criticized predecessor program, the new Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy pays businesses directly, no longer requiring them to rely on landlords to apply and agree to a 25 per cent cut in rent payments.

It also no longer sets a minimum 70 per cent revenue drop to qualify, using a sliding scale to pay out to any businesses whose income fell from a corresponding month in 2019 or from January and February of this year.

The maximum subsidy is 65

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per cent, but is topped up by another 25 per cent if businesses are shuttered by government order.

But Gyldenbjerg notes the monthly subsidy only covers rents as of Sept. 27, leaving out the entire period dating back to March's shutdown.

"Businesses were closed by mandate of the government, so why should we have to suffer the full amount? Everybody's hurting."

As someone helping businesses facing insolvency, Gyldenbjerg says she expected a surge in clients, but the past nine months have been "very quiet," forcing her to lay off a full-time employee.

"It's down to one part-time per-

See SUBSIDY, page 3

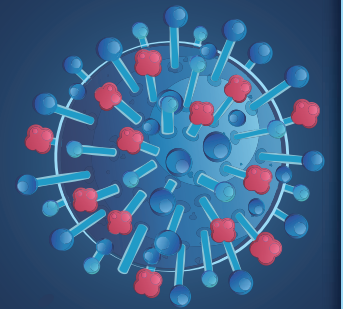
## SALTFLEET STAR



Mallory Mackesy photo

Mallory Mackesy, who helped the Saltfleet Storm capture the 2019-20 field hockey city championship, has earned a scholarship for 2022 from the University of Maine after submitting a backyard quarantine video. See story, page 29.

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# SUBSIDY ONLY COVERS RENTS AS OF SEPT. 27

Continued from page 1

son and myself, and me answering the phone," she says. "If it hadn't been for me putting my own money into my business personally, I would have had to close."

Joelle Turner, owner of The Energy Lab gym in Winona, says she welcomes any help but questions why the maximum subsidy is 65 per cent — shy of the 75 per cent offered to landlords in the previous program.

Her landlord never applied and she says the new subsidy will only cover 38 per cent of her rent.

"It's something, so I'm trying to be grateful, but holy Hannah I was expecting a little bit more help," she says.

Turner says she's staying in business by once again renting out spin bikes and other equipment to members because Hamilton's code red COVID rating



Richard Leitner/Metroland

Joelle Turner says the new COVID rent subsidy will be of limited help to her Winona gym, The Energy Lab, where she held outside classes over the summer to survive.

limits her Lewis Road gym to 10 people per class, including the instructor.

"I'm playing it day by day," she says. "I just want to get my business back."

The new subsidy comes too late for a neighbouring furniture store in her strip plaza, Expressions in Wood, whose owner was locked out at the end of May

after being unable to make rent payments.

Brian Sloat says he's given up on reopening there because he's been advised it could take up to a year to take his landlord to court for allegedly violating Ontario's Protecting Small Business Act, which was supposed to stop COVID evictions.

Calling the legislation "a waste of time and paper," he says he's instead decided to open a new showroom in a strip plaza at 720 South Service Rd. in Stoney Creek.

"I cannot be without a store that long, so we signed a new lease," Sloat says.

Patti Hall, executive director of the Stoney Creek Chamber of Commerce,

says the new rent subsidy "is a definite improvement," but agrees it's too little too late for some businesses.

Many landlords were reluctant to apply for the old subsidies, she says, including because they had to do so individually for each business, a barrier for those with multiple tenants.

"I personally think overall that the government reacted quickly, swiftly and put in place things that were over and above," she says of Ottawa's pandemic relief.

"The rent one definitely was a killer for some people because sometimes it's their biggest expense."

Hall says there are several other COVID programs for businesses, like the federal wage subsidy, partly forgivable emergency loans and deferred sales tax payments, but she'd also encourage them to apply for those available to everyone.

This includes a six-month deferral on mortgage payments, which can lessen the financial squeeze

and doesn't require applicants to show personal hardship.

"I think you're still going to see a lot of businesses shutter," she says. "You're going to see new ones pop up, too."

Hamilton East-Stoney Creek Liberal MP Bob Bratina says the new program acknowledges the landlord subsidies didn't work as hoped, but is unlikely to be extended back to March given a projected \$381-billion deficit for 2020.

"To broaden it adds to the numbers and I'm sure we're running out of numbers," he says.

"We're hoping the light is at the end of the tunnel and that this money, for people it evaded so far, could be the thing that tides you over to better days."

*STORY BEHIND THE STORY: We wanted to find out whether the federal government's latest rent subsidy program will help local businesses stay afloat during the pandemic's second wave.*

## BUSINESSES CHARGED WITH COVID VIOLATIONS

FALLON HEWITT

Seven more Hamilton businesses have been charged with flouting COVID-19 regulations and bylaws in the past week.

And one of them is a repeat offender, according to the city's online list.

Krown Kafe has been

charged a second time for failing to comply with the Reopening Ontario Act (ROA) — it's also the establishment that inspired the city's naming and publishing of charged businesses.

On Nov. 26, the Queenston Road restaurant allegedly failed to provide and post a required "safety

plan," according to the city.

The city had previously laid four charges against the restaurant under the ROA including: allowing members of public to play live music/sing with no barrier, no face coverings being worn, no physical distancing being practised and failing to keep proper

contact tracing records.

During the city's COVID-19 update Monday, Emergency Operations Centre director Paul Johnson said the bylaw officers continue to be out in the community enforcing the rules — and that doesn't just mean a one-time visit for each business.

The Hamilton Spectator was unable to reach the Krown Kafe for comment.

Other businesses on the list had breached the rules by allegedly staying open later than allowed, having too many people inside and not enforcing masking.

Those facing charges this past week include: the Galley Pump Tavern on Wentworth Street North for exceeding the maximum number of people al-

lowed in a restaurant; Nobody's Perfect Bar and Grill on John Street North for staying open past permitted hours; Fla Cafe and Bar on Barton Street East for staying open past permitted hours; Big Bee Convenience on Concession Street for mask violations; Diamond Beauty and Barber on Upper James Street for mask violations; and First Barber on King Street West for mask violations.

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