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Dear Heads of Municipal Councils:

Ontario continues to prepare for federal legalization of cannabis by moving ahead with its safe and sensible framework to govern the lawful use and retail distribution of cannabis as a carefully controlled substance within the province. On December 12, 2017, Ontario passed legislation that will regulate the lawful use, sale and distribution of recreational cannabis by the federal government's July 2018 deadline.

I am writing to provide you with an update on the provincial work underway to establish a retail and distribution channel for legal cannabis. I would also like to confirm the Province's commitment to engaging with municipalities on funding to help address the incremental costs associated with the implementation of cannabis legalization in Ontario.

Our objectives in the establishment of the retail and distribution system for legal cannabis are to protect youth and eliminate the illegal market. Municipalities are essential partners in the efforts to achieve these goals.

As noted in my October 27 letter, the various engagements the province has had with municipalities have been beneficial. Over the course of November and December, staff from the Ministry of Finance and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) met with staff of the municipalities identified for the initial cannabis retail stores for July 2018. These meetings provided valuable insights on provincial guidelines and areas of local interests that will inform store siting. I would like to thank the staff of these municipalities for their thoughtful feedback.

With the conclusion of the federal government's consultation with provinces and territories on the tax framework, we now have a better understanding of the revenue share to address the costs of legalization. During those discussions, we negotiated for a greater share of revenue on the basis that both the province and municipalities bear incremental costs. We now look forward to engagement with municipalities on a reasonable distribution of the province's share of the federal excise tax revenue. Given the federal government's forecasts of modest revenue and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' estimated cost projections, our engagement will need to acknowledge that it appears unlikely there will be enough revenue to fully cover the incremental municipal and provincial costs associated with legalization.

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In January 2018, the Ministry of Finance will work with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the City of Toronto to launch an engagement process with municipalities on cannabis-related funding. This process will consider what is known about incremental municipal and provincial costs and set out a proposed approach to funding for municipalities that supports our shared policy objectives.

To help guide this engagement, I would like to propose the following principles:

- Address Implementation Costs – An approach to funding should acknowledge that the province and municipalities will incur upfront incremental costs as a result of the federal government’s decision to legalize cannabis and that a funding approach should focus on helping to address these costs.
- Respect the Role of Municipalities – An approach to funding should recognize the efforts of municipalities in their areas of jurisdiction associated with the legalization of cannabis.
- Align with the Term of the Federal Tax Framework – An approach to funding should align with the two-year term agreed to between the federal, provincial and territorial governments on the federal excise tax.

As we conclude the holiday season and reflect on the past year, I would like to thank you again for your meaningful engagement with the province as we all prepare for the legalization of cannabis in July 2018. Please accept my best wishes for the New Year.

Sincerely,



Charles Sousa
Minister

- c: The Honourable Yasir Naqvi, Attorney General of Ontario
The Honourable Bill Mauro, Minister of Municipal Affairs
Ali Ghiassi, Chief of Staff, Minister’s Office, Ministry of Finance
Scott Thompson, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Finance
Nicole Stewart, Executive Lead, Cannabis Retail Implementation Project,
Ministry of Finance
Lynn Dollin, President, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Pat Vanini, Executive Director, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Municipal CAOs and City Managers