



October 26, 2020

Minister Doug Schweitzer
Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation
Government of Alberta
425 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

email: jei.ministeroffice@gov.ab.ca

Minister Leela Aheer
Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women
Government of Alberta
227 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

email: cmsw.minister@gov.ab.ca

Dear Minister Schweitzer and Minister Aheer,

The COVID-19 pandemic has put our 20 Alberta based junior hockey teams at risk of not being able to continue operating.

Our Alberta Junior Hockey League (AJHL) and Western Hockey League (WHL) hockey teams, which proudly represent communities in all areas of our province, rely almost entirely on ticket sales and local sponsorships to survive. Restrictions that are in place on spectator capacity, due to COVID-19, will eliminate any opportunity for our hockey teams to generate enough revenue to remain viable. We recognize the need for these restrictions from a public health perspective, but unfortunately they put all of our teams in jeopardy.

On behalf of the 15 hockey teams representing the AJHL and the 5 Alberta-based WHL teams, we propose entering into a partnership with the Government of Alberta to ensure the highest level of our Alberta amateur hockey system survives this pandemic. Our 20 Alberta based hockey teams, are not only **major economic drivers (over \$90 million annually) for communities across our province**, both urban *and* rural, they are also a critical source of local pride and inspiration during these challenging times. Our hockey teams are an **integral part of the social and cultural fabric of our communities attracting over 1.5 million fans while contributing over \$1.4 million in support to local minor hockey and charitable organizations each season**. In addition, our **WHL and AJHL Clubs and arenas employ over 1,500 full time and part time staff**.

The WHL also has an extensive post-secondary scholarship program that all graduating players are eligible to receive. During the 2019-20 season, the WHL awarded over 400 scholarships representing an investment by WHL Clubs in excess of \$2.7 million. As part of this investment, Alberta Universities and post-secondary institutions received \$954,000 in tuition fees on behalf of WHL scholarship recipients.

WESTERN HOCKEY LEAGUE

Father David Bauer Arena – 2424 University Drive NW
Calgary AB T2N 3Y9
Telephone: 403-693-3030 Fax: 403-693-3031
www.whl.ca

ALBERTA JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE

Cornerstone Plaza, RPO Box 50055,
Okotoks, AB T1S 0C4
Telephone: 403-995-9609 Fax: 403-995-9629
www.ajhl.ca

Developing these young men into both elite hockey players and outstanding citizens is a responsibility both the AJHL and WHL take very seriously and invest heavily in each season. By providing the highest caliber coaching, training and competition as well as opportunities to engage actively in community projects, the AJHL and WHL are leaders in developing these young athletes both on and off the ice.

From a WHL Alberta-based Club perspective, the shortfall incurred with the cancellation of the balance of the 2019-20 season combined with limited spectator capacity anticipated for WHL games this season, has resulted in an average loss for each Club of \$1.4 million. The losses would have been substantially higher had our Clubs not received financial assistance through the federal government wage subsidy (CEWS) program which has been taken into account and deducted from the operating expenses of each Club. The shortfall in operating losses does not include the Club commitments to fund the WHL Scholarship program obligations.

The AJHL and its member teams operate as non-profit organizations and collectively the League has suffered an estimated \$4.0 million shortfall due to the cancellation of the 2019-2020 season playoffs, development camps as well as lost sponsorship and ticket revenue while navigating the 2020-21 season with limited spectator capacity.

The WHL and AJHL have developed comprehensive protocols to ensure the health and safety of the players, staff, officials and fans remain the top priority. We have been working directly with senior officials from Alberta Health Services (AHS) on the protocols and are making progress as it relates to our Leagues resuming play this fall. It appears certain from our discussions with AHS that there will continue to be very significant limitations on spectator attendance during the current 2020-21 season. As a result of these restrictions and the adverse impact this will have on revenues, we have no alternative but to request support from the Government of Alberta to ensure the operations of our Alberta junior hockey teams are sustainable this season.

The AJHL and WHL are not asking the Government of Alberta to underwrite the losses of our Alberta-based junior hockey teams but rather to participate in a partnership to sustain these organizations given the integral role they play in their communities. All 20 franchises are willing to contribute to this partnership to ensure the survival of junior hockey in our province. The WHL Clubs are, under normal circumstances, fully self-sufficient and not at all reliant on government funding. In over 50+ years the WHL has never asked or received government funding for our Clubs operations; the AJHL has, as recently as 2018, been awarded funding under the Other Initiatives Program (OIP) recognizing its' support of community driven goals that have a public benefit and its' ability to stimulate economic activity across the Province .

This request for support addresses the losses each AJHL and WHL Club has incurred as a result of the cancellation of the balance of the 2019-20 season and the projected losses for the current 2020-21 season. The losses do not take into account how the virus may continue to adversely impact our team operations in the future.

In order to sustain the operations of the 20 Alberta based junior hockey teams and continue to provide players with highest level of development opportunities through the current 2020-21 hockey season, we propose the AJHL and WHL on behalf of their member Clubs in Alberta, enter into a partnership with the Government of Alberta as follows:

1. AJHL Request

Based on the losses described above during the 2019-20 season and the assumption spectator capacity will be limited this season, on behalf of its 15 member Clubs, **the AJHL requests \$2.0 million to sustain and provide the necessary stability for our teams this season.**

2. WHL Request

Based on the losses incurred during the 2019-20 season and the assumption spectator capacity will be limited this season and result in our WHL Alberta based teams incurring an average operating loss of \$1.4 million, each of the 5 WHL Alberta teams requests \$700,000 (\$3.5 million in total) to sustain their operations for the 2020-21 season.

In addition, to ensure WHL Alberta based teams are in a position to fulfill their obligations to the WHL Scholarship program for graduate players and to enable our teams to continue supporting local minor hockey programs, each WHL team requests \$150,000 in financial assistance (\$750,000 in total).

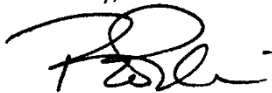
In total, the WHL requests \$4.25 million to sustain our 5 Alberta teams operations.

In supporting this proposal, the Government of Alberta will be partnering with Club ownership, community citizens, local businesses and League-wide corporate partners to enable these community hockey teams to survive the pandemic. Any financial assistance received will be allocated toward maintaining the highest caliber of training and competition for the players and sustaining the operation of the top levels of junior hockey in the province.

Nothing brings our Alberta communities together more during these challenging times than our local junior hockey teams. Ensuring these hockey teams will remain viable during the pandemic, will not only serve as a vital stimulus for our Alberta economy, but will help our communities cope, from a physical and mental well-being standpoint, during the winter months ahead.

We sincerely appreciate your consideration of this request. Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Ron Robison
Commissioner
Western Hockey League



Ryan Bartoshyk
Commissioner
Alberta Junior Hockey League

cc: AJHL Member Clubs
WHL Alberta Based Member Clubs