

'Waiting and waiting': Thousands of Ontario small businesses looking for grant money to keep lights on

TORONTO -- It appears there could be up to 56,000 small businesses waiting for a special grant to help keep the lights on during the latest COVID-19 pandemic shutdown in Ontario.

CTV News Toronto spoke with some Toronto small business owners who have become increasingly stressed.

"I lie in bed at night a lot of the time thinking about the bank account and how much is in it," said Matias Marin, co-owner of Houndstooth, a cafe and bar that rents practice space to musicians on College Street.

Marin has been hoping to receive the [Ontario Small Business Support Grant](#), a \$10,000 to \$20,000 handout to help businesses get through the province-wide shutdown.

Marin said the grant would allow him to pay off looming bills and buy new stock for an eventual reopening.

His application was submitted almost three weeks ago but there's no word if it meets the requirements to be approved.

The Ontario government said since Jan. 15 about 70,000 businesses have applied for the grant, with 14,000 of them receiving it so far, and it continues to process a huge volume of applications.

"Our government recognizes that necessary COVID-19-related public health measures come at a cost to Ontario's businesses, and will continue working hard on their behalf to ensure they get the support they need," said a spokesperson for Victor Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development.

"I've been waiting and waiting and checking my e-mails 18 millions times a day," said Michelle Bouzide, who owns Little Sito, a Lebanese Restaurant on Bloor Street West.

Despite pivoting to making meal kits and take out, Bouzide wants to use grant money to build a patio and expand its retail business.

"So we can survive when all the government programs are over," she said.



Following approval, the government says businesses that submit a complete application will receive a payment within 10 days.

NDP MPP for Davenport Marit Stiles has been trying to help some businesses try and access the grant.

She said she's hearing from businesses hitting obstacles and who instead need the money, especially after getting through the previous shutdown last spring.

"It's been really hard to get answers. We keep being told there's this magic 10 day period that we can expect to wait, but we're way beyond that now.

Many businesses haven't heard anything," said Stiles.

The government said the grants issued so far amount to \$195 million in support.

It said sometimes applications require further review and appreciates the patience from businesses.