Dear [Insert MLA name]

I am writing today as the [owner/director/manager] of [insert business name], in light of the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions being imposed on individuals and businesses across Northern Ireland, to ask you to back the Save Future Travel campaign and urge the Northern Ireland Executive to provide additional tailored support to travel agents and tour operators, who have been devasted by the current crisis.

[Insert some information on your travel business – for example, how long have you been in business, how many people do you employ]

In normal times, the travel industry is worth over £296m (GVA) to the Northern Irish economy, employing over 5,300 people full time. Travel is not only viable as a sector, but it will also be invaluable to the economic recovery of the nation – and it is critical that the Northern Ireland Executive does all it can to help businesses and protect jobs.

The Office of National Statistics published data in December 2020 which showed that the travel sector has been the hardest hit service sector in the UK economy as a result of COVID-19. This follows ten months of severe restrictions on trade, including constantly changing travel corridors, FCDO Travel Advice against many destinations across the globe, and local and national restrictions, such as ‘stay at home’ orders and closure of non-essential retail, that have decimated the industry and destroyed consumer confidence in travel.

This is reflected in the fact that nine in ten holidays due to take place last summer were cancelled and new bookings were down by more than 80% during our industry’s peak period. The latest announcements, including the ban on non-essential international travel and additional border restrictions, will only serve to worsen the situation further.

However, unlike many other sectors, travel businesses have not been offered tailored financial assistance. As the crisis continues, it is critical that the Northern Ireland Executive urgently considers tailored support for travel if businesses like mine are to survive the difficult winter months ahead, and the jobs we provide are to be retained.

[Consider adding personal circumstances here, e.g. As a travel agency business, we receive most of our income through commission that is paid close to the departure of clients. Having had to refund all monies earned for holidays due this year, and with the outlook for travel appearing bleak in the coming weeks, we need financial support to help us through to the next major travel period in Summer 2021.]

While the financial measures announced by both the Northern Ireland Executive and the UK Government to date have been welcome, the situation is more complex for travel businesses, who have not been able to fully take advantage of all the support on offer. For example, it is impossible for travel agencies to make the most of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. Despite the severe restrictions on trade, we have continued working to support customers affected by disruptions to travel plans, ensuring that they can be assisted both in destination, and also with future travel arrangements. When customers require our services more than ever, it is operationally impossible for travel businesses to furlough large numbers of their staff.

[Consider adding personal circumstances here, including any specific difficulties in accessing Government support schemes]

Recognising the seriousness of the situation, the Scottish Government recently announced a round of tailored grant support for both the travel agent and tour operator community in Scotland, and we need the Northern Ireland Executive to follow suit. As my local MLA, I am therefore asking if you will write to both the Finance Minister and the Health Minister to urge them to also consider:

* Providing tailored financial support for travel businesses, including renewed grant support for SMEs and those who were excluded from previous support measures. This would reflect the unique restrictions on travel which have seriously affected the ability of businesses to trade.
* Fully regionalising Northern Ireland’s quarantine policy. This would mirror the approach already adopted domestically and in other countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, allowing a more targeted assessment of risk and the eventual reopening of important trading routes.
* Working to ensure appropriate testing regimes are in place without delay and work with the UK Government to lead international coordination of testing with the final aim of removing quarantine.

Yours sincerely,