February 10, 2023

MPP Rick Byers
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North, 3rd floor
95 Grosvenor Street, Toronto ON M7A 1Z1

Dear MPP Byers

Provincial Budget 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to present in person on January 19, 2023. The Ottawa Board of Trade is the voice of business and a key advocate for economic development in our Nation's Capital. Our mission is to cultivate a thriving world class business community. One that drives affordable, inclusive, and sustainable city building and community prosperity. We work closely with the Ontario and Canadian Chambers of Commerce as well as key economic partners at all levels of decision making.

I would like to thank our local MPPs for their collaboration and hard work on behalf of our city. Special thanks to the Ontario government, the Ontario New Democratic Party, the Ontario Liberal Party, and the Green Party of Ontario as well as your staff teams for your support and consultation, demonstrating your understanding that business success and economic growth drive community prosperity and quality of life for all.

We have a unique opportunity to leverage the lessons we have learned in the last three years, including:

- Our economy and our health are intertwined.
- We must prioritize progress over perfection.
- And radical collaboration is our competitive edge.

Together, we must focus on a growth agenda. The key is to empower and inspire the private sector to lead the way. Ontario must focus on creating the right environment for business predictability, competitiveness, and growth. Today, we are asking the provincial government to focus on five main areas for our economic evolution, including:

1. Workforce Development
2. Housing
3. Innovative Infrastructure
4. Open for Business
5. Health Care

1. **Workforce Development - Labour shortages are one of the greatest challenges facing businesses today. Ensuring businesses find employees with the right skills is vital to our overall competitiveness. We recommend that we:**

    - Recognize foreign credentials, enhance online training, fast-track in-school credentials, and develop financial support for underemployed populations to access training opportunities.
    - Consider additional pathways to permanent residency for public post-secondary students.
    - Work with the federal government to increase Ontario's allocation of immigrants.
    - Continue to support and promote the skilled trades as a viable career option.
    - Work with post-secondary institutions to foster lifelong learning and secure the talent pipeline.
    - Explore options to incentivize applied research and greater participation in experiential learning programs from employers, especially small businesses, and employers in remote regions.

2. **Housing – As we seek to attract more immigrants, we need to ensure that we have adequate housing supply. We recommend that we:**

    - Create a distinct strategy to address regional challenges in housing supply.
    - Continue to support targeted workforce development in the skilled trades and increased economic immigration to attract and retain workers to build the needed housing supply.

3. **Innovation Infrastructure - Infrastructure is critical to economic growth and a key factor in determining where people choose to live, and where businesses choose to invest. In addition, our nation's capital is a gateway city for Ontario and a draw for international business and leisure travel. The visitor economy is the front door to every other form of economic development – and the amenities we build for visitors are the same we use to attract residents and talent. As such we recommend that we:**

    - Work with the private sector and federal and municipal governments
        - to address infrastructure backlogs and invest to spur new growth
        - to ensure the Nation's Capital has an integrated and reliable public transit system
        - to ensure the Ottawa International Airport can attract direct flights
        - to support the new build of the Ottawa Hospital as a world class care and research centre
        - to support projects that strengthen Ottawa as a destination including downtown revitalization

4. **Open for Business - The pandemic has exasperated many challenges for business, we must focus on making it easier to do business in Ontario. We recommend that we:**

    - Commit to and create mechanisms to protect and/or compensate parties from the cancellation or revisions of contracts with provincial government.
    - Modernize regulations and ensure timelines and consultations are transparent and give sufficient time for businesses to plan.
    - Ensure proposed changes are focused on outcomes and supported by cost-benefit analyses.

5. **Health Care - A strong economy is built by healthy and resilient communities. We need to address challenges within our health care system, as our population continues to age. We recommend that we:**

    - Commit to innovative future planning for health services and eliminating our back log.
    - Guard against the mental health "echo pandemic" by supporting Ontario workers, businesses, and the health care system to address increasing mental health and addiction challenges, including the opioid overdose epidemic.

The past few years have been characterized by tremendous uncertainty: a prolonged pandemic, record-high inflation, supply chain disruptions, labour shortages, rising cost of doing business and geopolitical turmoil. If we want our economy and people to emerge stronger amid so much uncertainty, Ontario must continue to focus on creating the right environment for business predictability, competitiveness, and growth.

We believe the COVID challenge can be turned into an opportunity if we become visionaries and collaborators focused on priorities that create inclusive and sustainable growth. Thank you for your continued commitment to strengthen Ottawa and Ontario.

Sincerely,



Sueling Ching
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