



# REGULATORY FEEDBACK FROM CHAMBER MEMBERS

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Presented To: Laurel Broten, Lead Reviewer, Tax, Regulatory, and Fee Review

## Who We Are

The Halifax Chamber of Commerce is a best-practice, business advocacy organization that continuously strives to make Halifax an even more attractive city in which to live, work, and play. Together, the approximately 1,700 member businesses and their over 90,000 employees, act as a single powerful voice to promote local business interests. The volunteer Board of Directors, and Chamber staff, undertake initiatives on behalf of the Chamber's diverse membership.

With origins dating back to 1750, we are recognized as the first Chamber established in North America. The Halifax Chamber is certified to the ISO 9001:2000 international quality standard, the first and only Chamber in North America to receive this accreditation.

The Halifax Chamber of Commerce offers over 100 events annually, countless numbers of opportunities for exposure through member services, advertising, and sponsorship. It also issues Certificates of Origin for those businesses that export internationally.

### **2013-2018 STRATEGIC PLAN – ASPIRATIONAL SENTENCE AND GOALS**

The Halifax Chamber of Commerce is committed to enhancing the prosperity of its members and to realizing Halifax's potential to be among the top 3 highest growth city economies in Canada by 2018.

1. To create a positive business environment to be reflected by being among the top 3 highest growth city economies in Canada by 2018.
2. To increase the skilled workforce by 20% from 2012 to 2018.
3. To accelerate prosperity of Chamber members by providing first class networking events, benefit programs, advocacy to governments, education, information and by making connections.

As part of the 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, the Halifax Chamber of Commerce created two Task Forces to provide input on the Plan's implementation. The members of the Task Forces are a diverse group of individuals with significant expertise on key policy issues.

## The Chamber's View on Regulation

Dealing with regulation is a fact of life for all businesses in Nova Scotia. Our members feel very strongly that our province needs a regulatory system that efficiently balances business costs with legitimate public interests. That is why the Chamber is so pleased that regulation has been included as a part of the province's tax review. It has been too long since there has been a comprehensive, detached look at our regulatory system. We urge this review to take a broad look at provincial regulations. Everything from regulated gas prices, to the Capped Assessment Program, to statutory holidays, has an impact on Nova Scotia businesses. Even more, regulatory reform is well suited to times of fiscal restraint. Done well, this review will save businesses money and encourage economic growth without increasing the provincial debt.

We have spent the past few weeks reaching out to our members to gather as many examples as possible of what regulations are not working. The most consistent comments we heard from businesses, no matter their industry, was that they needed government to be more responsive. Long processing times, slow responses from government officials, unclear program requirements, and a lack of information sharing between departments were consistent themes throughout our discussions.

It can be frustrating for a business to send in a critical application and have no idea how it is progressing. Implementing a robust tracking system for requests and applications would provide valuable certainty for businesses. Our members have also found that it is difficult to get timely responses from program operators and critical information and requirements are frequently not available online. Finally, businesses expressed considerable frustration with having to provide different departments with the same information multiple times. A broad client management system would be very beneficial for government programs well beyond the business sector.

We are looking for a public sector that has an 'open for business' attitude and that places a high priority on maintaining a reasonable regulatory regime. Government needs to consult with industry before introducing new regulations so we can all understand their impacts before they are implemented. We also encourage the government to implement a rigorous program evaluation regime that seeks to improve and replace existing programs rather than layering new programs on top of those that are not working. We would be happy to discuss any of the issues outlined in this submission in greater detail and we look forward to reading your final report.

## Specific Comments from Chamber Members

At the request of this review, the Chamber went out and spoke to our members about what the government should do to improve the regulatory system. The following are the results of that consultation.

### Workers Compensation Board of Nova Scotia

- Some business owners have found the Workers Compensation Board to be unresponsive to their needs and unfair in their settlement decisions. Overall, they question whether Nova Scotia has the right regulatory model for workers compensation.

### Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation

- Restaurant owners find the prices charged by the NSLC excessive compared to other Canadian provinces.

### Fuel Safety

- Previously, businesses were allowed to operate equipment as long as the Fuel Safety division was satisfied that businesses were complying on paper. This is no longer possible and it is causing businesses significant losses as they wait for the lengthy inspection process to be completed.

### Utility and Review Board (UARB)

- Some members expressed concerns that the UARB is not doing a good job maintaining affordable energy prices for Nova Scotians and wondered if Nova Scotia has the right regulatory model.
- Motor coach operators are frustrated that the UARB does not give them the flexibility to respond to surging demand from cruise ships in the summer.

### Licensing

- Requiring that applicants for a Private Investigator and Private Guard's license have no outstanding fines prevents companies from hiring the best candidates and unnecessarily restricts employment opportunities for low-income individuals.

### Fees

- The overall cost of starting and registering a business is far too high and discourages entrepreneurship.

### Funding Programs

- Multiple government departments and agencies offer funding programs, many of which are incredibly helpful for businesses. Providing money through so many different avenues however, creates redundancies and makes the overall system more difficult to access. Creating a one-stop-shop to access funding would be a major step forward.
- If funding programs were allowed to make interim payments instead of lump sum payments it would reduce the cash-flow problems businesses face when using otherwise very helpful government programs.
- Economic and Rural Development and Tourism's Business Development Program is a great example of a very useful program that suffers from accessibility and customer service problems. Businesses have found that the program does not provide clear updates on their application's progress, information requests often do not get a response, and the program requirements are poorly communicated and ask for highly proprietary information from applicants. The government also has difficulty providing payments to businesses without a vendor account and does not provide their accounts payable information online. These problems hurt what businesses say is an otherwise great program.

### Procurement

- Some businesses find the provincial government's procurement process too difficult to work with.

### Overall Ease of Access

- Government websites, such as Access to Business, are not accessible with some modern web browsers and non-Windows operating systems.
- Instead of trying to rework and align programs and requirements across multiple departments the government could appoint designated navigators to help businesses access the wide range of government programs and services available. This would also give businesses a single point of contact if they had questions or ran into problems.