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Labour and Advanced Education
Office of the Minister

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our file number:

November 9, 2015

Ms. Valerie A. Payn
President and CEO
Halifax Chamber of Commerce
Suite 100, 32 Akerley Boulevard
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada
B3B 1N1

Dear Ms. Payn:

I am in receipt of your letter dated September 23, 2015, in which you have advocated on behalf of the business community and Nova Scotians by bring the following policy matters to the forefront of the public agenda.

- (1) putting Nova Scotia's finances on a sustainable footing;
- (2) prioritizing youth retention programs; and,
- (3) creating a common sense regulatory environment.

It is my understanding that a similar letter was forwarded to the Premier's Office for response on September 28, 2015. However, as the Minister responsible for Youth, I will be responding to the issue of youth retention in our Province. Our government recognizes and values our youth and as a reflection of that the Province has made youth retention and attraction a priority.

Over the past year, the Province has celebrated many accomplishments. I am pleased to see the Universities, Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC), and the Province come together to create sandboxes where students, innovators, and industry can develop new ideas that could become businesses. By investing in sandboxes, leveraging the existing innovation eco-system, and helping students create new opportunities, the department is focused on enabling young people to stay in the Province.

We believe that giving our students the opportunity to experience hands-on learning will make them more employable upon graduation. To that end, we have created and/or enhanced a number of programs and initiatives. For example, sandboxes, Innovation Teams, Strategic Cooperative Incentive Initiative (SCEI), Student Career Skills Development Program, and MITACS. Upon graduation, young people can benefit from a number of programs.

- (1) Immigration streams
- (2) Graduate to Opportunity program (GTO)
- (3) Graduate Scholarships
- (4) Careers NS Transformation

We've also made significant improvements to help address student debt by eliminating the interest on the provincial portion of student loans and creating graduate scholarships.

Further, I would like to emphasize the establishment of our Innovation Teams that will work to identify and support initiatives that build a strong entrepreneurial spirit among Nova Scotia's post-secondary students. Providing experiential learning opportunities will give students more real world work experience and will help to connect them to the labour market. In turn, this will ensure that students are better prepared for the transition from post-secondary studies to the labour market. Additionally, the Innovation Teams will support efforts of Nova Scotia universities and the NSCC to collaboratively recruit students who wish to pursue studies in areas that connect with labour market demands, improve services for international students, and explore ways to encourage graduates to live and work in Nova Scotia.

The Province has already started work in areas of entrepreneurship by recently launching two new business immigration streams to attract international entrepreneurs and to retain international graduates of provincial universities and colleges. The International Graduate Entrepreneur Stream is open to graduates who have completed at least two years of full-time study from a recognized Nova Scotia university or Nova Scotia Community College, have operated their own business in Nova Scotia for at least one year, and intend to settle permanently in Nova Scotia. The Entrepreneur Stream is designed to attract individuals who wish to start or acquire a business and settle permanently in Nova Scotia. Both streams are scheduled to open January 1, 2016.

There are several programs that work to create an advantageous climate for new graduates. The Graduate to Opportunity (GTO) program provides salary contributions to employers to offset the cost of hiring a recent graduate. We believe this program will assist graduates in finding jobs in Nova Scotia; the program has already exceeded its targeted 100 positions this inaugural year.

The Department has financially supported the creation of internships with Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems (Mitacs). Mitacs is one of Canada's leading organizations linking business and academia through unique research and training programs. Working with 60 universities, thousands of companies, and both federal and provincial governments, Mitacs build partnerships that support industrial and social innovation in Canada. Their focus is on attracting and retaining skilled talent, in order to support the growth of the knowledge-based economy across the country. Mitacs has been delivering the Accelerate internship program in Nova Scotia since 2007.

The Province has also invested in the Strategic Cooperative Incentive Initiative (SCEI) and the Student Career Skills Development Program. SCEI aims to grow the number of cooperative education work placements available to students enrolled in cooperative education programs in Nova Scotia Universities and Community Colleges. The objectives of the program are to: support student career decision-making; support success in the workforce; and incent the hiring of cooperative education students. This incentive assists businesses and organizations to recruit and retain university and community college students by providing quality work experience, it encourages youth retention leading to full-time long-term employment, while also improving workforce productivity.

The Student Career Skills Development Program is a partnership with not-for profit organizations throughout the Province to support career oriented positions for post-secondary students during the summer. The program's provides assistance to community organizations, allowing them to get valuable work done during the summer. At the same time it gives post-secondary students quality summer work experiences while helping them earn money to pay for tuition.

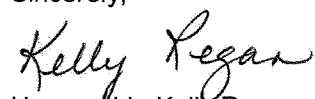
Government has made significant improvements to the Student Assistance Program to help address student debt. For example, if a student graduates from a four-year degree program, their Nova Scotia Student Loan is forgiven under the new loan forgiveness program. Up-front grants have also been increased (from 20% to 40% of the Nova Scotia Student Loan). Also, on March 28, 2014, government announced the elimination of interest paid on the provincial portion of student loans to qualified borrowers to make it easier for students to live and work in Nova Scotia.

I do want to bring to your attention that Labour and Advanced Education (LAE) and Education and Early Childhood Development are partnering to create a Transition Task Force, a deliverable under Nova Scotia's Education Action Plan. The Transition Task Force will identify existing gaps in helping youth access and succeed in post-secondary education and/or work. It will develop recommendations to align resources and efforts to assist students in identifying their career goals and creating and/or improving academic pathways to assist them in achieving those goals.

It is my understanding there will be a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce and LAE staff, and I look forward to learning more from the discussions at that meeting on the issues around youth and employment.

I would like to thank you for raising this issue and commend you on your desire to see a better and more prosperous Nova Scotia.

Sincerely,



Honourable Kelly Regan
Minister of Labour and Advanced Education