



Friday, January 28, 2022

Via Email: edminister@novascotia.ca

Dear Minister Corkum-Greek,

Thank you for taking the time to have an introductory meeting with the Chamber prior to the holidays and thank you for agreeing to come to the NSBLEC (Nova Scotia Business and Labour Economic Coalition) meeting next week on February 2nd. This group is comprised of businesses, not-for-profits, The NS Federation of Labour, and represents over 10,000 organizations and 200,000 employees.

As you know, the NSBLEC has had an enormous impact on the wellbeing of the business community during COVID, providing a province wide collaborative space for governments at all levels as well as business and community organization to share ideas. This group was able to influence policy and programs in real time, when immediate action and constructive feedback was needed to keep the economy moving and businesses supported during COVID.

The Omicron variant has forced us to take a step back once again, just as it appeared we were on a path to economic recovery. It has raised the level of anxiety in the business community as many restrictions were lifted but back in place. While the federal and provincial governments have put some new supports in place or extended existing measures, we wanted to reach out to the NSBLEC community to understand what was happening on the ground and provide you with some of that input prior to the meeting next week. In short, what is working, where the gaps are and who may have been missed in the latest round of supports.

The first broad concern and ask is for the province to bring forward a collaborative recovery plan. Sadly, we did not see this from previous governments, but we are hopeful that with the change of government we will see proactive plans to both immediately exit our current wave, and a longer-term plan to help the business community recover. Businesses spend significant time planning for the weeks, months, and years ahead and without a comprehensive recovery plan from the provincial government, there is just too much uncertainty, and many feel they are moving forward blindly. As we move into the endemic mode of the crisis, a plan must be developed with provincial leadership that looks out 6 months to a year to determine what supports will be needed and what tactics the government can leverage with business to support business and jump start the economy.

The remaining high-level suggestions will be in a more condensed format, and it should be stated that all the players in NSBLEC are ready and willing to be partners in any action undertaken.

- Support the local businesses in continued animations and activations for the upcoming tourism season. The monies managed by Develop NS and NSBLEC through the Tactical Recovery Plan were used to great effect, but more will be needed in 2022.
- Review immediately the unintended consequences of the most recent restrictions and the businesses not able to access critical supports. For example, cosmetology and small retail has not been included as

eligible for the impact grant, yet their businesses have essentially been shut due to the recent restrictions. Although these businesses were not ordered to 50%, the continued messaging from Premier Houston and Dr. Strang was stay home, slow down to stay safe. These messages are a significant cause of the required slowdown in people moving around our province. Broaden the sectors eligible for this grant program.

- Hotels are seeing cancellations of events already into the second quarter of 2022. Consumer confidence is way down, not only in the hotel industry but across all hospitality sectors as well as retail. The province had a confidence campaign that was planned but was never launched. It is critical now more than ever and this plan must be expanded on and launched to assist in recovery.
- Labour shortages could be the number one issue facing businesses in 2022. The province needs to look at measures that will broaden the access to workers, particularly in hospitality and tourism. For example: Expanding GTO (Graduate to Opportunity) and similar programs, giving foreign students more access to work hours, increasing immigration, more quickly certifying permanent residence foreign workers that arrive with skills.
- While provincial support for another federal CEBA loan/grant program is critical the province can also look at another wave of (\$5000) grants for a much broader base of impacted businesses in this wave, including retail. These funds could be used for existing losses or could support a “restart” program for marketing, online set-up etc.
- Insurance costs are rising to unsustainable levels for many small businesses. What role can the province play in reviewing and regulating the cost of business insurance.

While this is just a short list of some of the major concerns and input from the NSBLEC group we believe the two-way dialogue that happens live at these meeting is even more critical to our economic recovery. We believe NSBLEC can remain an extremely effective use of governments time in gaining business input into the economic conditions we are all facing. I believe the Department of Economic Development is interested in supporting the continuation of NSBLEC, but without continued attendance by government representatives, the business community believes the opposite.

The Halifax Chamber and the NSBLEC are very interested in continuing or renewing discussions with government and I look forward to speaking to you. Please let us know your thoughts on the issues that have been raised.

Regards,



Patrick Sullivan
President and CEO
Halifax Chamber of Commerce