



January 28, 2021

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North, 3rd Floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Z1

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy:

The Whitby Chamber of Commerce is pleased to present our 2021 Provincial Budget submission.

As we approach one year since the lockdowns from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we know just what a crisis this has been for our communities. Ontario, as with the rest of the world, has been faced with unprecedented challenges.

On behalf of over 650 members, we appreciate the challenge government has faced to flatten the curve and keep our communities safe. It is no easy task. But at the same time, through no fault of their own, our local business community members are going into debt and losing their livelihoods. Help is needed now more than ever.

We need growth and optimism in our province, and especially here in Whitby.

Pandemic Recovery and Support

In last Fall's budget, the theme was: protect, support and recover. This budget contained a strong strategy and while progress was made in the fall, the provincial lockdown in December 2020 was a critical setback for many businesses.

The resulting shutdown stymied any real recovery, and we need to get back on track as soon as it is safe to do so. We have seen no data at this time that small businesses were the source of any significant spread of the pandemic. They have been unfairly punished with the lockdown restrictions that have been largely caused by unnecessary community congregating gatherings and operations.

Small business is the lifeblood of the province and we call on the Ontario government to turn its attention from enforcement to a safe, thoughtful and effective recovery program to give them a fighting chance. This can take many forms and we would ask the Government to:

- Prioritize recovery for all Ontarians, especially with small business that has had a distinct disadvantage competing against larger retail chains that have remained open during the lockdown.
- Invest in our competitiveness, where grants can greatly assist these businesses to get back on their feet and ensure they have the resources to follow best provincial health measures. Instead of just focusing on enforcement, give provincial staff the ability to be



a proactive and supportive resource to businesses looking to do what it takes to open their doors as soon as possible.

- Finally, provide clear guidance on the government's COVID-19 recovery strategy. As our businesses continue to prepare for added restrictions and new measures moving forward. We must provide them with communication early and clearly and provide the support businesses require to adhere to any new measures imposed.

Skilled Trades

As identified by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, we support reskilling of unemployed and underemployed Ontarians. Economic recovery from COVID-19 will require a rapid return to work for many Ontarians. Given the urgency, provincial and federal funds could be flowed through Employment Ontario to support short-term micro-credential programs that meet local and sectoral needs.

Implement hiring incentives that allow small, rapidly growing companies to scale up their workforce and create more jobs, while reducing the financial risks associated with hiring.

Employment Ontario has specific, pre-existing programs at its disposal which could be helpful, such as Second Career, which is designed for displaced workers and delivered by public and private colleges.

Colleges, including Durham College with a campus in Whitby, have many Program Advisory Committees composed of employers that could help identify relevant skills.

We know there is a demand in the skilled trades sector and colleges are trying to expand capacity to meet the need. Investments to support that expansion and grant funding for expanded enrollment are essential to ensure we have the workforce to meet current and future demands to re-open our economy.

On behalf of our members in Whitby/Durham Region we specifically thank you for your efforts. We appreciate the opportunity to represent our business community.

Regards,

Corette Miller

Corette Miller
President, Board of Directors
Whitby Chamber of Commerce

Cc:

Mr. Lorne Coe, MPP, Whitby
Mr. Ryan Turnbull, MP, Whitby
Mr. John Henry, Regional Chair & CEO
Mr. Don Mitchell, Mayor Town of Whitby