

April 15, 2025

Hon. Stephen Crawford  
Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement  
5th Flr, 777 Bay St.  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2J3

**RE: Ontario Business Imperative: Advancing our AI Advantage**

Dear Minister Crawford,

Congratulations on your re-election and renewed mandate to protect Ontario's economy and enhance its competitiveness. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) looks forward to working with you and your government to drive inclusive, sustainable economic growth.

Today, I write on behalf of our [Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) Hub](#), a group of business leaders across the technology sector, including major tech firms, accelerators, and post-secondary institutions, to provide recommendations to increase AI and emerging technology adoption among businesses to advance productivity growth in Ontario.

Ontario's technology and innovation landscape is facing disruption due to gaps in AI skills adoption, changes in technological advancement, and concerns around trust and accountability. The government has taken an important step with the *Enactment of the Enhancing Digital Security and Trust Act, 2024* (EDSTA) which includes accountability measures to guide the responsible use of AI in the public sector.

As the legislature resumes, the Ontario Chamber urges your government to build upon recent efforts and leverage province's growing technology corridor to strengthen business resiliency, growth, and competitiveness:

1. **Boost AI skilling for businesses:** According to the OCC's [2025 Ontario Economic Report](#), uncertainty on where to begin (31 per cent) and a lack of capacity or time to adopt (27 per cent) are the top two barriers preventing businesses from leveraging emerging technologies. Addressing these gaps through targeted AI skilling and capacity-building initiatives will be essential to accelerating adoption across Ontario's business community.
  - o Expand targeted supports and grants to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) prepare their workforce for the future by integrating AI and other emerging technologies.

- o Prioritize skills development through robust upskilling and re-training initiatives. This includes strengthening industry-academia-SME connections to identify sector needs and leveraging digital technologies for business growth.
  - o Improve post-secondary graduates' readiness to use and manage technology in the workplace by significantly boosting students' experiential and work-integrated learning opportunities in the emerging technologies space, including co-ops, internships, micro-credential programs, and fellowships. This should be done in close collaboration with industry and post-secondary institutions.
- 2. Drive business competitiveness through innovation:** Ontario is a leader in digital technology investment, with more than 400 AI technology companies. As Ontario navigates economic and trade uncertainty, strategic AI adoption can strengthen productivity, innovation, and supply chain resilience, helping businesses improve efficiency and unlock new market opportunities.
- o Establish targeted programs and incentives to accelerate AI integration in key industries such as manufacturing, logistics and healthcare. Focus on supporting AI adoption for SMEs and facilitating partnerships between industry and AI technology providers to improve risk management, diversification, and operational optimization.
  - o Support domestic innovators in high-priority sectors by establishing a co-investment strategy, through Venture Ontario, to expand access to growth capital and scale homegrown solutions.
  - o Provide funding and resources to assist SMEs in entering international markets. This can include grants to hire export development managers, trade mission support, and access to market intelligence, enabling businesses to grow amid trade uncertainty.
- 3. Enable trust and accountability:** As AI and emerging technology adoption grows, ethical considerations are essential for building trust, managing risks, and ensuring compliance with evolving regulations.
- o Support the development of business models that prioritize data protection and cyber resilience, particularly as Ontario implements new legislation such as [\*Bill 194: Strengthening Cyber Security and Building Trust in the Public Sector Act\*](#). This includes convening industry, government, and academia to align on advancing the use of standards—an invisible but vital layer of governance—to create laws and policy frameworks that are uniform, interoperable, and adaptable.
  - o Equip SMEs with practical governance tools and best practices, including guidance on data privacy, cybersecurity, and risk management.

As we deal with shifting economic headwinds, there has never been a greater need for a proactive policy strategy that supports the industries of today and strengthens foundation for the industries of tomorrow. The OCC and its members are committed to working collaboratively with your Ministry

to responded to today's threats and build towards our shared goal of inclusive, sustainable prosperity.

Sincerely,



Daniel Tisch  
*President & CEO*  
*Ontario Chamber of Commerce*

cc.

Hon. Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade  
Hon. Nolan Quinn, Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security  
Aaron Pereira, Co-Chair, OCC Artificial Intelligence Hub & Executive Director, WatSPEED at the University of Waterloo  
Christine Guyot, Co-Chair, OCC Artificial Intelligence Hub & Director, Corporate Affairs, Microsoft