

May 14, 2020

The Honourable Rod Phillips
Minister of Finance
7th Floor, 7 Queen's Park Cres
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y7

RE: Ontario's Post-COVID-19 Economic Recovery and ICI Construction

Dear Minister Phillips,

Thank you for your continued leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the situation evolves, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) is receiving concerns from the business community and communicating them to all levels of government.

I am writing to express the concerns from the OCC's Construction and Agriculture Working Group. These concerns relate specifically to institutional, commercial, and industrial (ICI) construction projects. With the closure of construction sites to prevent the spread of the pandemic, 94,000 construction workers lost their livelihoods in April 2020. The continued shutdown of a significant portion of ICI construction leaves many of these workers out of work and presents significant financial risk for companies.

The construction industry is critical to our economy. Not only does the industry build and maintain our Province's infrastructure, hospitals, and almost all public projects, but it generates economic activity and employs 466,000 Ontarians. Furthermore, the construction industry creates an important multiplier effect across the supply chain given the impact it has on many adjacent industries, including forestry, concrete, aggregate, and cement. Not surprisingly, Ontario's construction industry has traditionally been relied upon to assist the Province in recovering from economic downturns.

Most contractors that worked in ICI construction (before closures were implemented) are now working at a significantly reduced capacity on other projects that were permitted to continue under the essential services list. These contractors are familiar with and meeting new and existing provincial health and safety measures, which would enable them to take on new projects. It is important to underscore that opening-up ICI construction would not bring about a surplus of new contractors or businesses operating in Ontario. It would simply increase the capacity of contractors already working and practicing stringent safety protocols.

As of May 8, 2020, the WSIB approved 331 COVID-19 claims. It is important to note that none of these claims emerged from the construction industry. The construction industry is steadfast in its commitment to protecting the health and safety of workers and of the public. The industry continues to improve its health and safety protocols to minimize any potential spread within and

beyond worksites, including developing procedures for meeting physical distancing requirements and implementing staggered shifts and breaks.

Given the measures taken by this industry and nature of construction work, our members are confident that the entire construction industry should be opened to help kick-start the economy and support other provincial sectors during this unprecedented time. For example, Ontario's forest products sector, declared an essential workplace on March 23, 2020, depends on a vibrant provincial construction sector.

Public health and safety are priorities for all Ontario businesses. We will continue to monitor and assess new developments pertaining to COVID-19 closely and work with our members, partners, and all levels of government to provide support to Ontario business.

Sincerely,



Rocco Rossi
President and CEO
Ontario Chamber of Commerce

CC: The Honourable Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
The Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs
The Honourable Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development
The Honourable John Yakabuski, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry
The Honourable Laurie Scott, Minister of Infrastructure