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To: The Standing Committee of Finance and Economic Affairs

August, 2020

As Canada's largest Business Improvement Area founded in 2003, Emery Village BIA is located in northwest Toronto's Ward 7, represents 3200 Business and Commercial Properties that employs over 28,000 people. In 2019 the Province of Ontario designated the area as an Employment District. We work with the City of Toronto's Economic Development office and other BIAs to engage and give voice to our businesses. Emery Village BIA is unique from other BIAs and is just one of two in the City that encompass not just retail Main Street, our membership includes Commercial, Industrial, Services, Automotive, Manufacturing, Warehousing, Logistics, Food Processing.

With the onset of the Covid -19 Pandemic, northwest Toronto has seen a disproportionate number of Covid-19 cases in the communities and neighbourhoods adjacent to the BIA. The 28,000 employed (before the Pandemic) reflect Toronto's diversity and especially the residential communities of Ward 7- Humber River-Black Creek with immigrants accounting for 58% of the population (Statistics Canada, Census 2016) and a large proportion (60%) are 1st generation and newcomers.

As is the case in many parts of Toronto, the majority of the business premises are older, compact buildings lacking in up-to-date amenities and facilities that made them more difficult and expensive to adequately adapt their physical work spaces to the demands, protocols and measures required to control outbreaks and avoid the spread of the disease. Both essential and more recently, non-essential businesses were forced to scale down their operations significantly in order to re-open safely and responsibly.

Despite the steady stream of bad news in the past months, we were pleased to hear some good news from our members whose enterprises successfully transitioned into the production of PPE's, sanitizing products and the production of masks, acrylic barriers and other supplies mandated by the government to meet the needs for the pandemic.

While most Food Related industries which were allowed to continue their operations, they continue to face enormous pressures and challenges from supply chain disruptions and labour shortages and ensuring safe working environments. Many found that despite their best efforts, workplace transmissions and outbreaks limited their recovery efforts and set them on a steep learning curve that continues to date.

Our efforts during this time focussed on providing our members with the most up-to-date information and resources available to them both during the lock-down phase and in the stages of re-opening of the economy.

Complaints from our business members included concerns that many of the landlords did not wish to participate the government rent reduction agreements under CECRA , that would have significantly reduced their rent burden at least in the short term. Business closures continue to date while uncertainty about Covid-19 and the possibility of a future surge dampens the immediate outlook.

Other concerns centred on the need for providing fairness and equity in their dealings with government. Moreover, our members fear that the price of the recovery and debt burden will fall disproportionately on their shoulders with significant increases in business taxes. This would add to the accumulated debt that business owners have to confront in order to stay afloat. Already, they are seeing additional pressures on wages that for those businesses who exports to the US make them less competitive in that market.

Overall, we believe that the feedback from our business membership was generally supportive of the rollout of the various federal, provincial and municipal programs which helped mitigate the extensive damage to the economy and provides for support to bridge workers and employers towards conditions that favour a stable economic recovery. The compounding effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic, which transcended a health crisis to become a global social, political and economic catastrophe with few historic parallels. Covid-19 also affords us an opportunity to restate our values and propositions to shape our future aspirations as a society. It has forced us to look at the impacts of globalization, climate change, social justice, and the role of technology in our lives, and finally, in a post-Covid -19 world , what do want (less or more) from our governments?

The effort towards a return to normalcy beckons comparisons to the herculean task that confronted decision-makers following WWII. There are still lessons to be learned from that experience which launched the greatest economic expansion in recent history.

Recommendations

- **Continued and enhanced supports for businesses to assist them in creating safe working conditions for staff and customers. This should include provincial regime of certified training programs for trainers and workers.**
- **Incentives for businesses and landlords to undertake projects to accommodate the physical spaces for social distancing, including changes to production lines, shipping and handling, warehousing offices, common areas.**
- **Funding to support investments in the capital costs of technology and materials to assist with social distancing, air quality and to minimize transmission of the virus and any future pathogens in the workplace**

We are grateful for this opportunity for the Committee to hear from us and the views of our membership as part of their deliberations.

Respectfully submitted

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