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GREATER KINGSTON CHAMBER strongly objects to potential labour and employment standards reforms

Changes would discourage investment, eliminate jobs and diminish economic opportunities in Ontario, especially among small business owners

TORONTO, Monday, May 15, 2017: The Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) has sent a letter to Premier Kathleen Wynne warning against potential changes to Ontario's Labour Relations Act (LRA) and the Employment Standards Act (ESA). The letter is cautioning that these reforms may have unintended consequences impacting job creation and competitiveness, as well discouraging investment in the province.

The potential reforms are coming at a time when costs for consumers and the cost of doing business is high and putting Ontario at a competitive disadvantage. Ontario has experienced slower growth in GDP and job creation than in the past, and drastic reforms to labour and employment run the risk of causing serious damage to the future prosperity of the province.

These sweeping changes could seriously impact job creation and the health of our local economy, said Martin Sherris CEO, Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce. We need to get the message out that the proposed changes would discourage investment, thereby diminishing economic opportunities in Ontario. We want a robust economy, starting right here in Kingston. We are moving forward but there remains vulnerability and unintended setbacks can only add to a loss of business confidence. We are already aware of the ongoing cumulative burden of electricity prices, Cap & Trade and other increase business costs. It is essential that any legislated workplace changes should be evidence-based, fair and calculable, particularly for small business people to make the necessary adjustments and allow for reasonable budgeting.

In a letter to the Premier, Richard Koroscil, Interim-President and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce added, These sweeping changes will tip our economic balance in a profoundly negative way. The implementation of some of the policy options being considered would have the perverse effect of discouraging investment and eliminating jobs, thereby diminishing economic opportunities in Ontario. Politics cannot drive decision-making, evidence must.

On issues of non-standard and part-time work, Statistics Canada data shows that part-time work has risen 22 percent since 2003, down from the 36 percent increase in the previous 12-year period. Recent studies show that 76 percent of part-timer workers voluntarily choose part-time work to better accommodate schooling or personal life.

%We are urging Premier Wynne to complete an economic impact analysis of the proposed reforms to limit potential consequences that could seriously jeopardize our future growth,+said Richard Koroscil, Interim-President and CEO, Ontario Chamber of Commerce. %We support reform where and when it is needed, but we caution against change for change's sake.+

The OCC's letter reminds the Premier that Ontario's employer community is doing its part to create a better jobs and working conditions in the province. Budget 2017 points out that 98% of all new jobs created since the recession have been full time, and 78% have been above-average wage for their respective industries.

The letter notes that the goals of economic growth and improved employee rights are not mutually exclusive. The OCC believes that what supports the competitiveness of Ontario's economy can also help enhance quality of work. Increased education and enforcement may assist with compliance to Government regulations and can improve worker environments. Regulatory reform that raises costs for business, only to reduce the ability of business to invest in and grow the labour force is counterproductive.

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