

July 20, 2017

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs  
Eric Rennie, Clerk  
Room 1405  
Whitney Block, Queen's Park  
Toronto, ON  
M7A 1A2

**Re: Bill 148, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 and the Labour Relations Act, 1995 and to make related amendments to other Acts.**

Dear Members of the Standing Committee:

I am writing you today on behalf of the Board and Members of the Haliburton Highlands Chamber of Commerce, urging you to reconsider the pace of implementation of the changes proposed in Bill 148.

Ontario businesses are the backbone of our communities; creating local jobs and increasing economic growth around the province. The *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act* will have extremely harmful consequences in the province of Ontario, the scale of which will be largely unknown until the full force of the legislation is brought into effect. To demonstrate true fairness and compassion for workers, we must ensure Ontario has a strong economy to help create jobs and increase economic growth.

Member businesses of the Haliburton Highlands Chamber of Commerce are worried about these proposed changes. While the Chamber agrees some changes are necessary, the burden should not be placed on the backs of small business, as will be the case if many of these reforms move forward. Small businesses in the Haliburton Highlands are already struggling with the rising cost of doing business and these changes will mean more costs which they simply cannot afford.

Small businesses are having the same problems managing rising costs as residents. Hydro and propane bills running into the thousands of dollars in winter months are common. The ever-increasing administrative and financial burdens on small businesses make it increasingly harder to stay afloat.

The full understanding of the economic impacts of these legislative changes can only be realized after a full economic analysis. The Keep Ontario Working Coalition has commissioned their own thorough and comprehensive assessment to fully evaluate the damage these changes will generate. Once the report is released in August, we would encourage the government to consider a slower pace for implementation and other options to support businesses in a difficult period of transition.

Haliburton Highlands businesses are concerned that higher wages, more rules and increases in mandated leave will make it harder to hire new employees. They worry that higher costs will have to be passed on to customers, increasing the cost of living for everyone. Over-burdened employers fear spending more of their time on administration and red tape. And at the end of the

day, the costs for all of the Province's proposed changes would come directly from the already-light pockets of local entrepreneurs.

A small business owner from the Haliburton Highlands who wishes to remain anonymous is quoted as saying: "Many jobs have already been lost due to the cost of operating a business here in Ontario. Closures and relocations are just a few of the results. Many small businesses are already struggling to stay afloat and a wage increase such as the one proposed will be crippling to some. Such a significant increase at once will result in a freeze on hiring as well as a decrease in hours to those employees that fall into that sector." This is a common sentiment from business across our region.

The government must consider a slower pace for minimum wage implementation to allow businesses predictability and the ability to adjust. The government should look to other jurisdictions for guidance on reasonable timelines for implementation. According to the Premier's own 2014 Minimum Wage Advisory Panel, in analyzing Canadian research, youth employment will drop by 6 per cent for every 10 per cent increase in minimum wage.

Increasing the minimum wage by 32 per cent over just 18 months is completely unmanageable for Ontario businesses. Even more unmanageable is a 23 per cent increase over the next seven months.

Small businesses are the engine of economic growth in Ontario. Running a small business means taking risks – in many cases, borrowing against your home and your future to deliver goods and services, and to create local employment. Employees are often unaware when an owner skips his or her own paycheque, or takes out a line of credit to bridge the slow winter months in a tourism-driven economy such as the Haliburton Highlands.

With small business owners already facing these burdens, we are calling on the government not to add to these pains by making it harder and more expensive to do business in Ontario.

We appreciate your attention to this letter and look forward to seeing the outcome of your work over the next month.

Sincerely,



Richard Wannan  
President  
Haliburton Highlands Chamber of Commerce