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MEDIA RELEASE

Ontario Government's move to make province Open for Business is the correct course of action: Chamber

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sault Ste. Marie, ON – Tuesday's Ontario government announcement of the *Making Ontario Open for Business Act*, was welcomed by the Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce and by the wider provincial Chamber network. The proposed legislation includes a repeal of some of the most cumbersome and economically-challenging aspects of Bill 148. The new legislation would also see the dissolution of the Ontario College of Trades and improvements to the journey-person-to-apprentice ratio.

Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce Acting President, Carlo Spadafora notes that the Chamber's position has been clear from the beginning: Bill 148 was too much, too fast. "From the implementation of Bill 148, we became aware of the unintended consequences of this legislation and the impact on both employers and employees."

"In consultation, our members have made clear the compounding effects of Bill 148, including the need to decrease product offerings and increase the price of products being sold, hire fewer employees, reduce services and hours of operation, cut back on employee benefits, increase their reliance on automation, and halt capital investment – all in an effort to stay afloat. This is not good for economic growth or for the workers Bill 148 was purported to aid."

One of the reasons why Bill 148 has had such a negative impact was its hasty and unresponsive implementation. This sweeping legislation was introduced less than 10 days after the release of the Changing Workplaces Review, a two-year study of provincial labour and employment standards legislation. Despite the considerable scale of this study, the government did not take the necessary time to consider its findings, test its recommendations, or conduct in-depth stakeholder consultations on its results before proceeding with legislation. Nor, was an economic impact analysis conducted and released by the Province before the bill became law. In many cases, the government went beyond the recommendations of the Changing Workplaces Review, introducing amendments such as the most dramatic increase to the minimum wage we have seen anywhere in North America.

The imbalanced labour standards established by Bill 148 come at too high a cost to the economy and workers, as they have limited the ability of business to grow, hire, and invest.

Ontario's Chamber network has long-maintained that the current skills mismatch across the province is also a very real problem. Jobs are going unfilled while the demand for highly-trained workers continues to increase. Of the new jobs created in the next decade in Ontario, 40 percent are expected to be in the skilled trades, but only 26 percent of young people aged 13 to 24 are considering a career in these areas.

Since its inception in 2009, the Ontario College of Trades has faced criticism from industry, with concerns about fees, the compulsory membership structure, and the College's regulatory functions negatively impacting small- and medium-sized enterprises.

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Ontario Government's move to make province Open for Business, continued...

In October 2013, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) released the report, *Caution: Work Ahead*, detailing specific recommendations on how to make the College more responsive to the overall needs of the economy.

OCC President, Rocco Rossi states that "Yesterday's news signals the provincial government's commitment to making Ontario's skilled trades apprenticeship system more responsive to the needs of the economy, and to addressing a dire labour shortage. The College has become overly focused on enforcement and regulation, limiting its ability to serve the public interest by attracting and training new tradespeople. The OCC has long advocated for the College to modernize the apprenticeship application system, promote the skilled trades as a viable career option for young people, and revise the journey person-to-apprentice ratio framework to create more opportunities within the skilled trades. As these reforms were not made, the OCC recommended to dismantle the College and return responsibility for trades regulation to the Province."

About the Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce

The Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce represents the interests of 700 plus business and agencies in Sault Ste. Marie and has been serving the needs of this community since 1889. The Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce will lead the way as the voice of business, advancing economic prosperity for its membership and the business community. Learn more about the SSMCOC at www.ssmcoc.com

About the Ontario Chamber of Commerce

For more than a century, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) has been the independent, non-partisan voice of Ontario business. The OCC's mission is to support economic growth in Ontario by defending business priorities at Queen's Park on behalf of its network's diverse 60,000 members.

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