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Honourable Caitlin Cleveland
Minister, Department Education, Culture & Employment
Government of the Northwest Territories
PO Box 1320, Yellowknife, NT, X1A 2L9

December 13, 2023

Re: Labour Market Impact Assessment Exemption

Dear Minister Cleveland,

Congratulations on your recent election as an MLA in the Territorial General Election and subsequent appointment as the Minister of Education, Culture & Employment (ECE). Immigration is a top advocacy priority for the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce and an area of interest shared by the City of Yellowknife. We are proponents of a streamlined immigration system as a means of addressing labour shortages felt across all sectors of the NWT's economy. In early 2023, the Yellowknife Chamber formed an immigration sub-committee with the dual mandate of education and advocacy. The Yellowknife Chamber and the City of Yellowknife have advocated for improved immigration programs that work within the northern context. The Immigration Committee, which includes the Yellowknife Immigration Partnership and CDETNO, together with the City of Yellowknife encourages the Territorial government to push the federal government for a northern exemption from the Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) requirement.

An LMIA exemption would allow an employer to hire a foreign worker without having to go through the (lengthy) process of obtaining a positive LMIA. An LMIA is a document that employers in Canada need to obtain before hiring a foreign worker to ensure that hiring the foreign worker will not have a negative impact on the Canadian labour market. For an employer in the North, the LMIA requirement is an extraneous and time-intensive hoop to jump through when the pervasive labour shortage throughout the North is well established. If employers were able to hire a Canadian into their job they would have. An LMIA exemption for the North would acknowledge the northern reality that labour shortages are a way of life, not just a result of the pandemic.

There exists precedent for such an exemption as with the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (taking place in a number of cities across Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia). Furthermore, in meetings with Federal IRCC staff, whose mandate includes LMIAs, they encouraged the GNWT to request an exemption - a strong indication that the federal government would support such a request.

We strongly support the Northwest Territories Nomination Program (NTNP) that offers an alternative to employers applying for LMIAs primarily through the Francophone stream. One way in which a wide-ranging exemption to the LMIA requirement might be achieved for northern employers would be the extension of this program to include English-speakers, particularly for entry level and semi-skilled occupation categories. This would effectively render a northern LMIA exemption through the NWT's Territorial programs. This is a small but meaningful change that is within the power of the Territorial government to effect through negotiations with the federal government.

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We support the Nomination program because it is an effective program at attracting foreign workers already in Canada, such as foreign students who have graduated and received a work permit. The gap in the system is ensuring an effective recruitment of foreign workers from outside the country. Currently it can take as long as 8-12 months to move through the immigration process when it comes to attracting and hiring foreign workers.

We understand that with the ECE portfolio come many priorities and limited resources with which to address them. We believe that the time is right to ask the federal government for a northern LMIA exemption as a part of the on-going negotiations for the five-year Immigration Agreement between the GNWT and the federal government. The labour shortage in the North is pervasive and immigration is a proven tool to help address labour shortages (and has great potential to grow our population). Other jurisdictions have been granted an LMIA exemption through their respective provincial nominee programs suggesting the federal government is willing to grant such waivers should the right conversations take place. This would be a relatively accessible 'first win' as a Minister, one that would benefit the business community and help contribute to a strong NWT economy and a diverse population.

We would be happy to meet with you and explore the details of this ask, and our larger stance on immigration in the NWT, in more detail should that be of interest to you. Thank you for your time and we look forward to your leadership in our government.

Thank you,

Adrian Bell
President
Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce

Mayor
City of Yellowknife