December 2, 2024

Hon. Premier David Eby
Office of the Premier Province of BC
PO BOX 9041, STN Prov Govt
Victoria, BC
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Via email: Premier@gov.bc.ca

Re: Congratulations & BIABC input for Mandate Letters

Dear Premier Eby,

On behalf of the Business Improvement Areas of BC (BIABC), I would like to offer our congratulations on your recent election victory. We look forward to working with your government in the spirit of collaboration to make things better for British Columbians.

Business Improvement Areas of BC (BIABC) are the provincial champion of strong, vibrant, and successful downtowns, main streets, and commercial districts throughout our province. Members represent more than 70 business districts that employ hundreds of thousands of retail, service, and office employees within defined business districts. These mostly small- and medium-sized businesses, represent a business segment that is responsible for generating a significant percentage of the province's GDP, as well as maintaining community excellence and the highest quality of livability.

We very much appreciated the timely response that you and your campaign team provided to a BIABC questionnaire. Today, I am respectfully proposing that as you compose mandate letters for your cabinet ministers, consideration is given to the following:

1. Targeted investments to improve community safety, including the implementation of a comprehensive policy framework and investment that shifts the focus solely from harm reduction to include prevention, treatment and enforcement. Understanding that longer-term solutions to the complex issues of mental health, addictions and housing will take time to materialize, we recommend an urgent and extensive investment in policy and actions to create safer streets in our business districts and neighbourhoods.

2. A humane response to the complex issues of mental health, addictions and housing – in the form of concrete policies and targeted investments. We recommend a comprehensive plan for youth and adults to create a specific pathway to access for on-demand, wrap around services, and sustained/intensive treatment, regardless of where one lives in the province.

3. Achieving concrete results with the federal government to address the significant issue of prolific violent and non-violent offenders. Businesses are struggling under the weight of repeated thefts and vandalism, often by persons with multiple charges and/or convictions for similar crimes. BIABC acknowledges the work of the province in addressing some elements of this issue with their federal counterparts, such as the creation of Dedicated Enforcement Hubs. However, we recommend more must be done to advance the concerns of the small business community and the general public with respect to repeated theft, vandalism and other non-violent offenses.

4. A review of the five-day mandatory sick leave policy. This policy was established in response to the pandemic and applies to all employees covered by the Employment Standards Act, including part-time, temporary, and casual. While there is a positive economic and social benefit, it is one of several employer-related costs that have increased in recent years - and puts the onus on a business owner to both pay the employee taking sick leave along with the employee backfilling that position. BIABC recommends a review, in consultation with the business community to seek options such as a rebate or subsidy that reduces the financial liability for businesses without placing an administrative burden on them. An amended policy would provide 5 sick days in total, rather than 5 days per employee (full time/ part time – 30+hours).

5. Improved delivery, increased access and awareness of the Securing Small Business Rebate Program – along with an extension beyond its current end-date of January 2025. BIABC was a strong advocate for the creation of a fund to help offset costs being incurred by businesses and for preventative measures because of property crime and vandalism. We believe the program can serve a valuable purpose but has fallen short of expectations because of the cumbersome application process and the lack of awareness.

6. The creation of a stand-alone ministry of Small Business. BC's small and medium-sized businesses are the largest private sector employer in the province, and they need a voice. Small businesses are the lifeblood of

every community and critical to the vitality of downtown business districts and neighbourhoods. A dedicated ministry would help government better understand the health of the sector and respond to its specific and nuanced challenges.

BIABC will continue to advocate on behalf of small and medium-sized businesses on the basis of being solution-focused. To that end, we believe consideration of these matters will help create a better future for British Columbia – and look forward to working closely with you and your colleagues over the next four years.

Yours truly,

Jeremy Heighton
President - BIABC
CC:

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