BIABC Survey Finds Growing Crime Concerns Taking Increasing Toll on BC Businesses and Their Employees

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VANCOUVER, BC - As British Columbians prepare to celebrate Labour Day and recognize the contributions of workers across the province, a new Business Improvement Areas of BC (BIABC) survey suggests many business owners are increasingly concerned about the safety of their employees, customers and commercial districts.

BIABC represents the majority of 80 business improvement districts and more than 55,000 small businesses operating in communities across the province. A survey, based on a modest sample of 100 businesses in different parts of the province, reveals remarkably consistent concerns about worsening street disorder, repeat offending and public safety, reinforcing issues BIABC has been raising with governments across British Columbia for several years.

"Our survey may be modest in size, but the message is unmistakable," said Jeremy Heighton, President of the Business Improvement Areas of BC. "Business owners continue to tell us that crime, vandalism and street disorder are affecting not only their operations, but the well-being of the people they employ every day."

Among the survey's findings:

- **65%** say public safety and street disorder are significant concerns for their business.
- **63%** say operating conditions have worsened over the past year.
- **68%** are concerned about the impact crime is having on employee well-being.
- More than half say public safety issues are making it harder to recruit and retain employees.
- **89%** believe governments are not doing enough to address repeat offending, retail crime and public safety.

Businesses identified open drug use, street disorder, aggressive behaviour, vandalism and shoplifting as the issues having the greatest impact on their operations. Many respondents described employees dealing with harassment, break-ins, graffiti, discarded drug paraphernalia and increasingly difficult interactions with customers concerned about safety.

"Labour Day is about recognizing workers," said Heighton. "Too many employees are beginning or ending their shifts wondering whether they'll encounter aggressive behaviour, open drug use, vandalism or another break-in. No one should have to accept that as part of coming to work."

The survey also points to a growing disconnect between the investments businesses are making to improve safety and government policies that increase those costs. Beginning October 1, British Columbia's expanded Provincial Sales Tax will apply to private security services used by businesses throughout the province.

“Businesses have responded to rising crime by investing in security patrols, alarm monitoring, cameras and other measures to better protect their employees and customers," said Heighton. "Unfortunately, just weeks from now those same businesses will be required to pay PST on many of those services. At precisely the time businesses are being encouraged to invest more in safety, government is making those investments more expensive."

The survey found nearly **90%** of respondents support BIABC's call for the provincial government to pause the expansion of PST to professional services and work with businesses on a more balanced approach to affordability and competitiveness.

"Businesses are resilient, but resilience has limits," Heighton said. "This survey should serve as another reminder that public safety is no longer simply a policing issue - it's an economic, workforce and community issue. Before asking businesses to pay more to protect themselves, governments should be asking Businesses why they have had to shoulder so much of that responsibility in the first place."

About BIABC

The Business Improvement Areas of BC (BIABC) is the provincial champion of strong, vibrant, and successful downtowns, main streets, and commercial districts throughout the province. Its members represent more than 80 business districts, employing hundreds of thousands of retail, service, and office workers.

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