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Dec. 15, 2020

Gen. Rick Hillier (retired), Chair
COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Taskforce
Ministry of the Solicitor General
George Drew Bldg. 18th Fl.,
25 Grosvenor St, Toronto, ON M7A 1Y6

Dear Gen. Hillier:

Congratulations on your appointment as the Chair of the COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force. I can't think of anyone better suited to provide leadership for this supremely important task.

I write to you today as the Executive Director of the Interior Finishing Systems Training Centre (IFSTC) to appeal to you to recognize the importance of the construction industry as a contributor to, and a driver of, Ontario's economy.

The IFSTC trains more than 300 apprentices in a normal year in the Drywall Acoustic and Lathing Applicator, Drywall Finisher and Plasterer, Exterior Insulated Finishing Systems, and Hazardous Materials Worker trades. The IFSTC also normally provides health and safety training for more than 6,000 members of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBC) and International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT) in non-COVID years.

We applaud the provincial government's efforts to keep Ontario residents safe and healthy during this unprecedented crisis, and we applaud Premier Ford's selection of you to oversee distribution of the vaccine. We agree with prioritizing Ontario's health care workers and elderly residents. They should be among the first people to receive the vaccine. We feel that it is incumbent upon us, however, to point out that the construction industry has been labouring since the beginning of the pandemic to contribute to, and help drive Ontario's economy forward. It is the construction industry that will help lead Ontario's economic recovery.

Construction accounted for 8% of Canada's GDP and employed more than 1.2 million people in 2019. A one-and-a-half-month shut-down of non-essential ICI construction in April and May impacted 62% of construction activity in Ontario.

The biggest concerns of contractors are ensuring the health and safety of their workers, followed by supply chain disruptions, keeping their firms in business, and meeting contractual deadlines and obligations.

At the height of the pandemic this past spring, 83% of contractors reported that their revenue was down an average of 42% compared to the same period last year. The second wave of COVID-19 has arguably worsened conditions for construction employers and further threatened their viability.

Many of the additional costs of making construction sites and workers safe, such as supplying Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and providing for sanitary and social distancing conditions, have fallen on trade contractors, yet were never factored into the initial bids for work. Trade contractors are also still contractually obligated to meet deadlines and schedules with the possibility of significant financial penalties for missing them.

On average, trade contractors are reporting losses of productivity amounting to a minimum of one hour per person per day, which could threaten the continued financial solvency of some employers over a prolonged period.

We ask you to consider the importance of the construction industry to Ontario's economy and the eventual recovery from COVID-19. Construction workers have been deemed essential since the start of this crisis and have reported for duty every day without complaint. They have not had the option of working from home.

We therefore ask that you consider, after the most vulnerable in our society have been vaccinated, that a higher priority for vaccination be assigned to those who work in the construction industry to continue driving our economy forward.

I would be happy to discuss any of the points raised in this letter with any of you at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ron Johnson', written in a cursive style.

Ron Johnson
Executive Director
416-558-1066