September 15, 2020

The Honourable Gerry Byrne  
Minister of Immigration, Skills and Labour  
Minister Responsible for Workplace NL

Dear Minister Byrne:

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Immigration, Skills and Labour and Minister Responsible for Workplace NL. As you advance activities in the interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, I am confident that you will support Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to obtain the skills they need to find and keep gainful employment in our province, to deliver a responsive income support program to residents, and to increase immigration to our province. Your department is vital to ensuring that people who make their home in Newfoundland and Labrador have the tools they need to succeed, and that businesses operating in our province can find the workforce talent needed to grow.

This year has been marked by economic and social turmoil not only in Newfoundland and Labrador but around the world. But with great challenges come great opportunities. Through focused efforts I know that we will overcome these challenges and emerge as a stronger, more caring, more compassionate, and more diverse province. Future generations will judge us not based on the size of the challenges we faced but on how we have solidified the financial, social, and economic foundation of our province. Our Government has a responsibility to respond swiftly, decisively, and effectively. The time for action is now.

The economic status quo is no longer acceptable. We need to move away from the well-worn economic cycles of boom and bust and foster an economy that is diversified and sustainable. We need to reinvigorate our economy to harness the great potential that lies in our technology sector, our world-class arts sector, and every other sector from oil and gas to tourism, from fisheries and aquaculture to forestry and agrifoods. I know that the people of our province work hard in these and other sectors and the Government must work equally as hard for the people.

Our work to create a robust, stable economy will provide a firm foundation to ensure the delivery of vital social and other services to residents of the province. Our Government must always be mindful of the needs of the most vulnerable in our society and must ensure that quality social services are available and accessible to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. To ensure our Government is meeting this need, a Gender-Based Plus Analysis must be integrated into all policies and proposals.
The business of government must also advance from the status quo. We need to reimagine how government works so that it works for the people. This change is long overdue and it will be transformational.

In particular, I am tasking you to work with your colleagues in Cabinet, with all members of the House of Assembly, and with your departmental officials to advance the following priorities.

We must significantly increase immigration to our province. Immigrants are instrumental to the future of Newfoundland and Labrador, and we must strive to attract and retain more immigrant families. Please implement the Immigration Action Plan, which includes a strong focus on newcomer retention, assisting migrant workers and international graduates to become permanent residents, engaging employers in facilitating workplace-based language training, introducing empowerment-focused employment initiatives for newcomer women, and promoting international entrepreneurship. In collaboration with key department and community stakeholders, develop a Ministerial Committee on Anti-Racism.

Continue to implement workforce development initiatives, including the provisions of dedicated staffing resources to work with the K-12 school system to provide relevant career-development supports and sector-specific labour market information products for inclusion in the new career education curricula. Collaborate with your colleagues, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, to develop targeted approaches for ensuring the provincial workforce supports the creation of an ecosystem that can attract and retain firms in the technology sector, including enhanced coding opportunities in the K-12 education system.

Foster innovative approaches to workforce development, future skills development, and labour market attachment by supporting industry and community-led initiatives through the Province's Workforce Innovation Centre. Provide workforce adjustment and training supports, as required, to assist individuals affected by changes in industry and the workplace through allocation of funding supports under the Labour Market Development Agreement.

You will be responsible for apprenticeship and trades certification and industrial training. We must build innovation and flexibility in the Province's apprenticeship system through increased harmonization and better access to online training and services.

I ask you to enhance program integrity measures under the income support program, including increased frequency of client file reviews. Provide opportunities for income support clients with moderate barriers to employment to transition into the workforce and achieve full attachment or re-attachment. Please review program and service delivery models for income support and employment and training programs to ensure continuous improvement. Examine the expansion of Employment Assistance Services in the province to inform the potential for further expansion.
You will also implement the new Employment Enhancement Program to support employers in the forestry, aquaculture, agriculture, and fishing sectors who are engaged in value-added secondary processing. This will be accomplished by providing wage subsidies and training allowances to create sustainable, long-term employment or seasonal employment. Build on the success of the Student Mentorship Program by offering summer career development opportunities in the agriculture, aquaculture, technology, forestry, mining, community, and oil and gas sectors. Deliver the Youth and Student Services Program to support initiatives such as career fairs and youth employment initiatives.

As Minister Responsible for WorkplaceNL, support a review of the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act by an independent review committee and advancing amendments that will improve the workplace compensation system for workers and employers.

I trust that you will be collaborative, honest, respectful, and transparent in your role as a minister. I also expect that you will hold yourself to the highest standards of ethical conduct and act at all times with integrity. Individually and collectively, we have a responsibility to seek out the best advice and the best ideas and to implement actions only in the interests of the people of our great province. We must be guided by evidence and research and take into account diverse perspectives as we make our decisions.

We cannot change our past but we can shape our future. It is our job to build the bright future that our province and its people deserve.

Yours truly,

DR. ANDREW FUREY
Premier