Huron Chamber of Commerce
P.O. Box 144, 74 Kingston Street
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519-440-0176

April 21st, 2025

Hon. David Piccini, MPP
Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development
400 University Avenue, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 1T7

Hon. Lisa Thompson, MPP
Minister of Rural Affairs
College Park, 28th Floor
777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 2J4

Re: Request to Reopen and Extend the REDI Immigration Pilot Program

Dear Ministers Piccini and Thompson,

On behalf of the Huron Chamber of Commerce and the many local employers we represent, we are writing to respectfully request the Province of Ontario take the following actions regarding the *Regional Economic Development through Immigration* (REDI) pilot program:

1. Reopen the REDI program to additional communities, including rural regions such as Huron County; and

2. Extend the program's current end date beyond December 31, 2025 to ensure long-term, strategic impact.

Recent changes to federal immigration and labour force policy — including tighter restrictions on the Temporary Foreign Worker program and reduced access to open work permits — have had an outsized impact on the hospitality sector. These changes have created significant uncertainty for trained international employees and the rural businesses that rely on them.

Rural employers in Huron County are already experiencing the consequences: reduced operating hours, unfilled positions, and the potential loss of long-serving staff who have made our communities their home. Without expanded access to tools like REDI, these challenges will only deepen.

At the same time, growing trade uncertainty with the United States has cast a further shadow over the rural economy. We commend the Government of Ontario for recognizing the potential impacts of this situation and beginning to coordinate a response. We believe that expanding and extending the REDI program can be a valuable part of that response — helping to stabilize the rural labour force, support key local industries, and strengthen Ontario's economic resilience.

This request to expand and extend the REDI program originated in a recent *Local Impact Briefing* hosted by the Huron Chamber. I have enclosed the associated briefing note, which includes a link to a recording of the briefing itself. We are working closely with local stakeholders across Huron County to advance this request and ensure that rural voices are heard.

We appreciate your attention to this matter of growing urgency. Thank you for your continued support of rural economic development in Ontario.

Sincerely,

Colin Carmichael
Executive Director

Huron Chamber of Commerce
Connecting Community Leaders

The Huron Chamber of Commerce is one of Canada's fastest growing Chambers, connecting community leaders and fostering growth since 1990. Representing businesses across eight Huron County municipalities, the Chamber focuses on growing the local economy, supporting business success, and strengthening our towns and villages. As an independent, non-profit organization, the Chamber advocates for business and community interests, facilitates collaboration, and convenes stakeholders to develop and support a vibrant and thriving county.

Encl: Local Impact Briefing Document (March 2025)

CC: Mayor & Council, Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh
Mayor & Council, Municipality of Bluewater
Mayor & Council, Municipality of Central Huron
Mayor & Council, Town of Goderich
Reeve & Council, Township of Howick
Mayor & Council, Municipality of Huron East
Reeve & Council, Township of North Huron
Mayor & Council, Municipality of South Huron

LOCAL IMPACT BRIEFING

IMMIGRATION POLICY CHANGES & WORKFORCE CHALLENGES IN THE LOCAL HOSPITALITY SECTOR

Date: Tuesday, March 4, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.
Format: Virtual/Zoom **– Recording:** https://youtu.be/lOCoWLvLTas
Host: Huron Chamber of Commerce

Invitees:

- Heads of Council and CAOs from Huron County's nine municipalities (or designates)
- Local federal and provincial representatives

Note:
In the interest of transparency and accountability, the *Local Impact Briefing* will be recorded and available to the public

Purpose:
The **Local Impact Briefing** series, hosted by the Huron Chamber of Commerce, is a new initiative designed to bring together local stakeholders to better understand how policy changes enacted beyond Huron County's borders affect our local businesses and communities. These briefings focus on decisions made outside Huron County — at the provincial, federal, or international levels — that carry significant local consequences. Our goal is to provide local decision-makers with accurate information and context to enhance their capacity to advocate for their communities and to communicate effectively with residents and business owners.

Issue:
In 2024, the federal government introduced several new immigration regulations affecting the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) program and other immigration pathways. These changes will further reduce access to temporary and permanent foreign workers, worsening existing labour shortages in Huron County's hospitality sector. If these workforce gaps worsen, business closures, reduced operating hours, and service cutbacks could become increasingly common across the county. This will not only affect business owners and workers but also impact residents and visitors who rely on a vibrant hospitality industry.

Briefing Panel:

- Colin Carmichael, Executive Director, Huron Chamber of Commerce
- Brendan Jeffries, Owner, Tim Hortons (Goderich, Bayfield)
- Justin Reid, Team Reid McDonald's (Exeter, Goderich, Wingham, Kincardine, Grand Bend, Mitchell)
- Swet Ghandi, Owner, Boston Pizza Goderich
- Dan Moynihan, Owner, Tim Hortons (Clinton, Seaforth, Blyth, Milverton)
- Yerusalem Berhane, Immigration Consultant

Anecdotal Examples from Local Businesses:

- Upon receiving an invitation for permanent residency in August, a couple was promoted to Manager and Assistant Manager of a restaurant in a community of 600 people. They left Brampton four years ago to pursue rural living and are ready to purchase a home and raise their family here. In October, their Permanent Residency application was declined with little recourse to appeal.
- The spouse of an individual studying for his Veterinary License had been advancing into a leadership role at a local restaurant. Recent changes to work permit eligibility now limit family open work permits to select occupations, excluding hospitality. While this individual will move into management, future pathways for similar cases are uncertain.
- Families of international workers are integrating into the community, with children thriving in local schools and spouses finding full-time employment. These families are deeply committed to their workplaces and the community, but immigration barriers threaten their long-term stability.

Key Concerns:

- Ongoing workforce shortages across restaurants and hospitality businesses.
- Retention challenges due to work permit expirations.
- Barriers to extending or transitioning trained international workers to permanent roles.
- Disconnect between federal immigration policies and rural workforce realities.

Why It Matters:

- Local business stability is at risk due to labour gaps.
- Accurate information is needed to counter public misconceptions about immigration and the hospitality workforce.
- Municipal leaders can amplify rural concerns when engaging federal representatives.

For more information and to RSVP:

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Executive Director
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