



Monday, April 15, 2024

Sent via email
MEDJCT.Minister@ontario.ca

Hon. Vic Fedeli
Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
College Park 18th Flr,
777 Bay St
Toronto, ON M7A 1S5

Dear Honourable Minister Fedeli,

Re: Western Ontario Warden's Caucus Support for Small Business Enterprise Centre Funding

As you are aware, Small Business Enterprise Centres play an invaluable role in supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses across Ontario. For over 25 years, these centres have been instrumental in providing essential resources, tools, and guidance to individuals embarking on their entrepreneurial journeys.

There are 12 SBEC's located within the WOWC Counties, they are Collingwood, Orangeville, Niagara Falls, Stratford, Woodstock, Huron County, Sarnia-Lambton, St Thomas, Essex, Port Elgin, Owen Sound, Bruce County.

These centres serve as crucial hubs for budding entrepreneurs and existing small businesses alike. From assisting with business plans to aiding in recovery during challenging times, SBECs are pivotal in fostering economic growth and resilience within our communities. Small businesses are the backbone of the economy, making up 98% of all employer businesses in Ontario and Western Ontario is no different.

At the regular meeting of the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus on Friday, April 5, 2024 the Caucus supported Small Business Enterprise Centres with the following resolution:

Moved by H. MacDonald, seconded by D. Bailey:

Whereas for more than 25 years, the 47 Small Business Enterprise Centres (SBEC's) across Ontario have supported entrepreneurs and small businesses by providing the essential fundamentals, tools, and contacts they need to start and grow their businesses; and

Whereas 12 SBEC locations offer services in WOWC member municipalities; and Whereas the Small Business Enterprise Centres, or SBEC's, are often the first stop on an entrepreneur's journey; and

Whereas In addition to working with entrepreneurs at the start of their journey, SBEC's are called upon to support existing businesses, typically with 10 or less employees; and

Whereas this support comes in the form of supporting them with growth plans, succession planning, and with recovery during difficult times; and

Whereas, operating funding has stagnated, impacting the ability to maintain services, diminishing the time spent with clients, time spent in the community, and involvement in local events and programming; and

Whereas the short-term duration of the Transfer Payment Agreements, makes budgeting and long-term planning difficult; and

Whereas SBEC's Transfer Payment Agreements with the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, expires on March 31, 2024

Therefore be it resolved that Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus requests that the Province continue to fund SBECs and increase annual amounts in line with inflation and population growth.

And further that a copy of this resolution be sent to:

- Honourable Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation & Trade
- MPP Effie J. Triantafilopoulos, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
- MPP Andrew Dowie, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
- MPP Nina Tangri, Associate Minister of Small Business
- Stephen Rhodes, Deputy Minister for Economic Development, Job Creation & Trade
- Anne Bermonte, Assistant Deputy Minister, Innovation and Economic Partnerships Division, Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
- Western Ontario MPPs
- Municipalities in Western Ontario.

- **CARRIED**

We were encouraged to see in the budget that Ontario is investing an additional \$6.8 million over the next two years to enhance the Starter Company Plus program, allowing more eligible entrepreneurs to receive a Starter Company Plus Grant of \$5,000, that will provide grants to an additional 500 entrepreneurs over two years. As well as supporting the Summer Company Program, providing student between the ages of students between the ages of 15 and 29 with at least 12 hours of business training, one-on-one mentoring and grants up to \$3,000.

The budget failed to address operating funding for the SBEC's that has stagnated over the years, leading to challenges in maintaining services and adequately supporting clients. Core funding from the province has remained unchanged since 2014 and municipalities have increased their contributions by 68% over that period. Additionally, the short-term nature of Transfer Payment Agreements with the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade further complicates long-term planning and sustainability for these centres.

We look forward to collaborating with you on ensuring the prosperity of our small business community.

Sincerely,



Glen McNeil,
Chair, Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus

cc:

MPP Effie J. Triantafilopoulos, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
MPP Andrew Dowie, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
MPP Nina Tangri, Associate Minister of Small Business
Stephen Rhodes, Deputy Minister for Economic Development, Job Creation & Trade
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