



August 5, 2020

The Honourable Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
365 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1L1

Submitted electronically

Dear Minister Mendicino,

The Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON) represents over 200 builders of high-rise, mid-rise and low-rise residential buildings in the province. Our goal is to work in cooperation with government and related stakeholders to offer realistic solutions to a variety of challenges facing the residential building industry, which in turn have wider societal impacts. The focus of RESCON's work is on technical standards; labour relations; industry research and innovation; health and safety; regulatory reforms; and training and apprenticeship.

Canada's infrastructure and housing goals are contingent upon having a sustainable workforce. We believe the federal government has made great strides in addressing the skilled trades shortage through improved promotion of the many careers in the trades and through expansion of existing training programs and grants.

The federal government also plays a significant role in facilitating pathways into the construction skilled trades through immigration of skilled workers and temporary foreign worker programs. The Government of Canada is crucial in ensuring that policies are fair and equitable regarding trades equivalency testing for immigrants as well as language equivalency tests.

The industry has traditionally relied on skilled immigrants to sustain its workforce. This trend has helped build Canada and has fueled our country's residential construction boom dating back to after the Second World War. However, despite decades of success, this flow of talented and much needed workers has slowed in recent years.

The immigrants who started as workers in the 1940's and 1950's, embraced Ontario's construction industry creating companies which now employ thousands of workers contributing to Ontario's economic growth. This success story that has been repeated over the decades with subsequent flows of skilled trades immigrants is now in jeopardy unless targeted immigration programs for construction are improved, expanded, and implemented. In the short-term, this will also require the resumption of immigration services (processing of applications) with proper COVID-19 safety protocols and policies.

According to BuildForce Canada, within the next decade in Ontario alone, the construction and maintenance industry will need to hire, train, and retain almost 103,900 additional workers in order to meet labour demands due to retirements. RESCON members have already experienced difficulty finding talent to offset the aging workforce. While this will be felt across the entire industry, carpentry related trades including low and high-rise forming, Concrete and Drain, sewer and watermain installation and even bricklaying are statistically the most dependent on skilled immigrants.

RESCON, in partnership with the Toronto Region Board of Trade, is requesting that the government safely and responsibly resume immigration services that were put on hold due to COVID-19 to meet immigration level targets for 2020. Considering the current economic outlook, immigration is more important than ever for our economic recovery.

As RESCON and the Toronto Region Board of Trade are both Ontario-based organizations, we are also requesting that the government significantly increase the allocation number for Ontario's Provincial Nominee Program to allow the province the flexibility to recruit for specific skilled trades occupations. We believe that that this increased allocation number should correspond with Ontario's growing population and the growing investment in Ontario's key industries. The province consistently meets its targets and demand for the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program is growing. Finally, introducing a 'trusted employer program' within the Temporary Foreign Workers Program, would reward compliant businesses with a streamlined process to hire workers – less paperwork, less delays, and a reduction of unnecessary costs.

RESCON and the Toronto Region Board of Trade would be pleased to meet with you and your staff to discuss in more detail how industry and government can work collaboratively to improve the immigration system and achieve immigration goals which would have far reaching benefits for both employers and employees, and communities across Canada.

Thank you,

Richard Lyall



President
RESCON

Janet De Silva



President & CEO
Toronto Region Board of Trade

Copy to:

Hon. Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development

Walid Abou-Hamde, Director of Stakeholder Relations, Office of Minister Monte McNaughton

David Corbett, Deputy Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development

Olga Radchenko, Director of Policy, Office of Minister Marco Mendicino