



23 Mitchell Dr PO Box 1093
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Representing Northern Business Since 1973

September 08, 2020

Premier Caroline Cochrane
PO Box 1320
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9
Delivered via email: Caroline_cochrane@gov.nt.ca

RE: COVID-19 Secretariat

Dear Premier Cochrane,

We are writing to you regarding the COVID-19 Secretariat that was recently announced on Friday, September 04, 2020. From the press release, we are to understand that the creation of this Secretariat will “foster greater clarity, accountability, and consistency in the territory’s pandemic response. The Secretariat will be responsible for border compliance, enforcement, Protect NWT, 811, isolation centers, and personal protective equipment.” Our understanding of the announcement indicates that this Secretariat will be staffed by permanent employees “The Secretariat will be staffed by 150 full-time, part-time, and relief positions. The government is working on a breakdown of how many of those 150 positions will be new hires.”

This announcement has raised several concerns from the business community. Thus far, the total cost of a new GNWT division is budgeted at \$86m; \$23.4m from the Federal Government funding that was earmarked to better prepare our healthcare system. The primary justification for our extensively restrictive regulations, rules, and policies regarding COVID-19 was not to overburden an already taxed health system. Thus, we feel the \$23.4m would be better allocated to better preparing the healthcare system, not creating another unnecessary level of bureaucracy.

The business community is very concerned about creating a division in the Health and Social Services department six months into a pandemic and five months since our last case. We just went through budget deliberations where the business community was essentially told that it is up to us to generate more revenue. It was indicated that the GNWT could not cut costs anywhere thus the business community would have to carry the burden through increased small business tax (we currently have the highest small business tax in Canada already) and the possible introduction of a sales tax. By creating 150 new permanent positions, the GNWT puts an even further burden on the business community to financially support these new jobs. When currently 20-25% of the current GNWT staff are not back in the office, there is no reason why those individuals could not be redirected and those that need to be brought in should be done so on contract.



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The NWT has not had a COVID case in over five months, it has had the second lowest COVID cases in Canada. Of the 5 cases that have appeared in the NWT, all were travel-related. Despite these very positive statistics, we are the only jurisdiction in Canada that has chosen to take the money meant to assist our healthcare system and instead created a whole new government division. The GNWT needs to focus on hiring medical professions such as nurses, doctors, specialists, while investing in proper working equipment. The GNWT also needs to stop spending millions of dollars on residents who voluntarily leave the territory for vacations, as well as those who no longer live in the NWT but still have their ID and have been using our self-isolation as a paid vacation to see family. We are spending approx. \$4,000/individual to self-isolate which could be better spent on getting rapid testing, tracking individuals coming into and leaving the NWT, enforcement, etc.

We understand this funding bill will be presented for voting at the next sitting of the Legislative Assembly in October. Between now and that time, we ask that you please reconsider the creation of this division and listen to the residents of the NWT as you will find that the majority are against their taxes being used towards the creation of another level of bureaucracy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Renée Comeau".

Renée Comeau,
Executive Director NWT Chamber

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Jenni Bruce".

Jenni Bruce,
President, NWT Chamber



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With support from the following Chambers:

Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce

A blue ink signature of Tim Syer.

Tim Syer
President
Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce



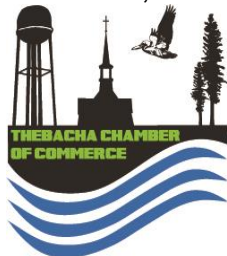
A blue ink signature of Deneen Everett.

Deneen Everett
Executive Director
Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce

Thebacha Chamber of Commerce

A black ink signature of Denise Yuhas on a light-colored background.

Denise Yuhas,
President, Thebacha Chamber of Commerce





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Fort Simpson Chamber of Commerce

Signature not available at this time

Kirby Groat,
Past President, Fort Simpson Chamber of Commerce



Cc: Principal Secretary – Shaleen Woodward; Hon. Caroline Wawzonek, Minister of Finance, and ITI; Hon Julie Green, Minister of Health and Social Services; Hon Shane Thompson, Minister of of ENR and Lands; Hon Diane Thom, Minister of Infrastructure; Hon Paulie Chinna, Minister Responsible for NWT Housing Corporation; Hon RJ Simpson, Minister of ECE and Justice; Ronald Bonnetrouge; Kevin O'Reilly; Katrina Nokleby; Rocky Simpson; Lesa Semmler; Caitlin Cleveland; Fredrick Blake; Jackson Lafferty; Jackie Jacobson; Frieda Martselos; Steve Norn; Rylund Johnston