6 April 2022

Standing Committee on Education and Economic Growth
Third Report of the Second Session, Sixty-sixth General Assembly
Committee Activities

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly,

The Standing Committee on Education and Economic Growth is pleased to present its 3rd report of the Second Session of the Sixty-sixth General Assembly.

Committee Mandate

The Standing Committee on Education and Economic Growth is charged with matters concerning education, heritage, culture, tourism, industry, labour, provincial infrastructure, transportation, telecommunications, immigration, rural development, municipal and provincial planning, and other such matters relating to education and economic growth.

Committee Membership

Permanent members of your committee are:

Zack Bell, Chair (District 10, Charlottetown-Winsloe)
Trish Altass (District 23, Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke)
Lynne Lund (District 21- Summerside-Wilmot) *(as of December 13, 2022)*
Mark McLane (District 10, Cornwall-Meadowbank) *(as of December 14, 2022)*
Gordon McNeilly (District 14, Charlottetown-West Royalty)
Hal Perry (District 27, Tignish Palmer Road)

Former permanent members of your committee include:

Hon. Ernie Hudson (District 26, Alberton-Bloomfield) (*until December 14, 2022)*
Stephen Howard (District 22, Summerside-South Drive) *(until December 13, 2022)*

Substitute members for the meetings referenced in this report include:

Sonny Gallant (District 24, Evangeline-Miscouche)

Background

Since January 11, 2022, committee members have been able to participate virtually. The Speaker invoked the provision for virtual hybrid proceedings in accordance with Rule 114 and for the first time in the province's history, members were able to attend meetings from their homes. This decision came from an increase of cases of COVID-19 cases on Prince Edward Island that required more people to isolate and therefore were unable to attend meetings in person. While this may have been the intent of invoking the

provision, members could appear virtually for any reason. Presenters had been given the ability to present in-person or via video conferencing in the past but now were strongly encouraged to present virtually to limit contact in the hopes of preventing transmission of COVID-19.

Your committee was the first to have members appear virtually and had utilized it for all meetings covered in this report. The successful use by various members to attend committee meetings has allowed for the regular use of this feature during the sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

Committee Activities

Since their last report on November 4, 2021 your committee met on seven occasions.

Your committee met on **December 7, 2021** to consider their work plan.

Your committee met on **December 14, 2021** to receive a briefing from the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning (Dr. Tamara Hubley-Little); Public Schools Branch (Norbert Carpenter, Kelly Drummond, Terri MacAdam) on the topic of diversity initiatives within the Public School Branch and to provide a briefing on the report conducted on incidents of bullying at East Wiltshire School.

Your committee met on **January 11, 2022** to receive a briefing from the PEI Partnership for Growth (Dawn Binns of Insight Studio and Robert Godfrey of the Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce) on their Economic Action Plan as part of a series of meetings on the topic of economic recovery.

Your committee met on **January 25, 2022** to receive three briefings. The first was a briefing from the Canadian Alliance for Skills and Training in Life Sciences (Penny Walsh McGuire) followed by a second corresponding presentation from the PEI BioAlliance (Rory Francis). Both of these presentations were part of a series of meetings on the province's economic recovery.

The third briefing on January 25, 2022 was provided by La Coopérative d'intégration francophone de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard (Angie Cormier, Eugénie Parent) on the following topics: Francophone immigration; barriers to recruiting and retaining francophone workers; labour shortages, and minimum wage.

Your committee met on **February 1, 2022** to receive two briefings. The first briefing was provided by the the Workers Compensation Board of PEI on the following topics: Impacts on long-term recipients of workers compensation; distribution of surplus funds to employers; reporting of workplace deaths and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among first responders.

Your committee also met on February 1, 2022 to receive a briefing from the PEI Federation of Labour (Carl Pursey) who spoke on the following topics of: barriers to recruiting and retaining immigrant workers; labour shortages, and minimum wage.

Your committee met on **February 8, 2022** to receive an update on the work of the Student Well-being Teams (Elizabeth Kennedy); Department of Justice and Public Safety (Darrell Wight); Community Mental Health and Addictions, Health PEI (Connie Platt).

Your committee met on **April 5, 2022** to consider their report.

Recommendations

As a result of its deliberations, your committee is pleased to recommend the following to the Members of the Legislative Assembly:

1. **Your committee recommends that government continue to support the growth of the bioscience sector on Prince Edward Island.**

   The PEI BioAlliance and Canadian Association for Skilled Training (CASTL) highlighted the importance of the bioscience sector to the province's economy as it is one of the most important export-driven sectors of the provincial economy, a high-value industry employing highly skilled and well-paid workers, a leader in bringing national and international investment to the province, and more.

   The continued support of this industry is encouraged by your committee as this is a unique industry which does not require much in the way of physical resources such as land, water or natural resources to grow. The bioscience industry has limitless potential for innovation and creation, demonstrated by the products and services being imagined and developed by these companies.

2. **Your committee recommends government establish a program mandated to provide human resources to small businesses that will assist in welcoming immigrant francophone workers.**

   Small businesses are less likely to have adequate human resource management to facilitate a welcoming workplace to help new employees integrate and settle into their new roles. La Coopérative d'intégration francophone de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard (CIF) stated that a large majority of their francophone clientele are not permanent residents and do not use the Atlantic Immigration Program, which most programs are tailored to.

   CIF stated, and your committee agrees, that there is lot of work to do in bringing the Island community and the employers together, and that a very strategic and targeted investment to enhance the welcome of immigrant workers will have a positive impact on recruitment and retention.

3. **Your committee recommends that government provide additional supports to the Francophone Mobility Pathway.**

   La Coopérative d'intégration francophone de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard (CIF) highlighted the need for the Francophone Mobility Pathway to be taken as seriously as the Atlantic Immigration Program. Employers who are utilizing the pathway are hiring employees before they arrive to the province. The Francophone Mobility Program allows the work visa to be processed quickly so program participants are ready to get to work when they arrive.

   The focus of the Francophone Mobility Pathway is to increase French speaking populations in Canada as our second national language. By promoting and utilizing this program effectively, Prince Edward Island can close gaps in the workforce by recruiting immigrant workers, as well as support and enhance francophone communities and culture on PEI by providing supports to assist immigrant workers with settling into their new communities.

4. **Your committee recommends government provide additional supports to the Canadian Embassy in Paris as they are able to provide assistance to those in search of francophone employees.**

   It was mentioned by the La Coopérative d'intégration francophone de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard (CIF) that their work was supported by the Embassy of Canada in Paris and that this service is free and accessible to employers.

   Workers through this avenue are filtered and are properly informed by Immigration Canada on their placement within the country before arriving. While this avenue works for many, the barrier still exists for nurses who are faced with the mandatory language test given by the National Nursing Assessment Service (NNAS). In many cases otherwise fully qualified nurses are unable to practice in Prince Edward Island due to failure of the language test.

5. **Your committee recommends that government work towards creating a program that bridges the gap between qualified immigrant nurses looking to relocate to Prince Edward Island and the language test required by the National Nursing Assessment Service (NNAS).**

   In the meeting with La Coopérative d'intégration francophone de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard (CIF) your committee learned that there are people willing to move to the province and practice healthcare but are faced with the barrier of the mandatory language test. Your committee strongly encourages the creation of an in-between program that can help recruit workers and provide support through the testing process.

6. **Your committee recommends that government explore raising the minimum wage to a livable income.**

   The PEI Federation of Labour stressed the need for workers to be able to afford to live, to buy houses or pay rent, and pay for any other necessities as this will in turn keep the economy stimulated. The federation shared their belief that the inadequate wages have caused the current labour shortage as Island residents who are trained in a skill that receives higher wages in other jurisdictions are likely to relocate.

   "We do have the workers here; we just don't have the wages" said the President of the PEI Federation of Labour, Carl Pursey.

7. **Your committee recommends that government place a heavy focus on green climate-resilient infrastructure projects as a way to recover the economy.**

   The PEI Federation of Labour stated that the encouragement in the use of public transit, green and renewable energy, energy conservation measures, home and building retrofits will not only generate jobs that will boost the economy, but also allow the province to reach climate change targets.

Conclusion

Your committee thanks all those who have presented to the committee and to government for considering the above recommendations. Your committee would also like to thank the Legislative Assembly Broadcast Department for all the work that has gone into making virtual-hybrid meetings possible.

Respectfully submitted,

Zachary Bell, MLA
Chair, Standing Committee on Education and Economic Growth