

MEDIA RELEASE

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**Ontario Chambers Offer Advice to Federal Government on New
Immigration System**

Windsor, ON – The federal government should ensure that upcoming changes to Canada’s immigration system reflect the needs of employers, according to a report released today by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber and Chambers across Ontario.

The report, *Think Fast: Ontario Employer Perspectives on Immigration Reform and the Expression of Interest System*, provides advice to the federal government as it finalizes the design of the Expression of Interest (EOI) system, a new process for selecting and processing the majority of new immigrants to Canada.

Slated to be introduced in early 2015, the EOI system will give employers a key role in selecting future Canadians through job offers. In the new system, many immigrants will have jobs before they arrive in Canada.

“This has been an issue many of our members have been bringing to our attention, including the Ontario Chamber of Commerce Roundtable co-hosted in September 2013 with Ministers Michael Coteau and Teresa Piruzza at the Windsor-Essex Chamber office as part of the foundation work for this report,” said Matt Marchand, President and CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce.

“This has been a longstanding issue for the Windsor-Essex business community. Both locally, provincially and nationally we have been working on solutions for these issues including a lengthy meeting with the previous Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Jason Kenney late last spring,” Marchand continued.

According to employers, *Canada must aim to have the fastest system in the world*. The speed of the system is the single most important factor in determining whether employers will participate in the EOI system. Under the Australian model, visas for permanent residence are processed within 58 days. The Government of Canada is proposing a 6 months processing time under the EOI system.

WINDSOR-ESSEX REGIONAL Chamber of Commerce

“This wait is far too long for businesses, many of whom have jobs that needed to be filled yesterday,” said Allan O’Dette, President and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

The EOI system must also be client-focused. In order to successfully encourage prospective immigrants and employers to use the EOI system, the federal government must view both parties as customers. This implies, at a minimum, one-window access to an online system, a 24 hour hotline for employers and immigrants, and minimal paper burden.

“A simple, customer-focused system will attract the participation of small and medium enterprises, the linchpins of our economy,” said O’Dette. “These employers typically do not have the time or resources necessary to navigate a complex system. Reduce the time and effort required to navigate the system, and they will participate; make the system too complex and bureaucratic, and they won’t.”

The EOI system must also be marketed internationally to top foreign talent. An ‘if you build it, they will come’ strategy will not work. Canada must aggressively brand itself to potential immigrants as the world’s best place to live, work, and do business.

According to O’Dette, “other countries are upping their games when it comes to attracting top talent from abroad. Our long queues and slow processing times for skilled immigrants are hurting our competitiveness. The EOI represents a big opportunity to fix our dysfunctional immigration system, if it is designed properly.”

“President and CEO Allan O’Dette and his OCC team have done some great work and we’re looking forward to working with the federal government to implement these ideas,” added Marchand.

Download the report at: www.windsorchamber.org/in_the_news/media-releases to read all 13 recommendations.

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