The
CHAMBER.

May 22, 2025

The Honourable Aris Babikian, Chair
c/o Members of the Committee
Standing Committee on the Interior
Whitney Block, Room 1405
99 Wellesley Street W
Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

Subject: Recommendations on Bill 5: The Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, 2025

Dear Honourable Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Timmins Chamber of Commerce, representing a vibrant and diverse business community deeply invested in the prosperity and responsible development of Northern Ontario, we are pleased to submit our comments regarding Bill 5, "The Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, 2025."

Overall Feedback on Bill 5

We recognize and commend the government's objective with Bill 5. Ontario urgently needs to accelerate responsible economic development, particularly within our vital critical minerals sector. Lengthy project approval timelines, often extending to 10 or 20 years, significantly hinder investment and impede Northern Ontario's immense potential. Our overarching goal is to streamline these processes while simultaneously upholding robust environmental stewardship and advancing Indigenous economic reconciliation. Achieving this critical balance is paramount for long-term prosperity across our region.

We acknowledge the significant step forward represented by the proposed Mine Authorization and Permitting Delivery Team (MAPDT), which aims to establish a "one project, one window" approach. Furthermore, we recognize the potential of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to attract targeted investment and stimulate economic activity. Bill 5 introduces broad changes that necessitate careful consideration to ensure its positive intentions lead to a truly balanced approach for a strong industry, empowered Indigenous communities, and a protected environment.

While there's a clear imperative for streamlining, ensuring this is achieved while upholding robust environmental stewardship and promoting genuine Indigenous economic reconciliation is paramount for long-term, sustainable prosperity.

To ensure Bill 5 effectively achieves its goals while upholding responsible and sustainable development in Northern Ontario, the Timmins Chamber offers the following recommendations:

Recommendations on Enhancing Process Efficiency and Accountability

We begin by addressing the crucial need for enhancing process efficiency and accountability within the regulatory framework. The MAPDT should be granted a clear, legally defined "lead agency" mandate with the authority to genuinely coordinate and enforce timelines across ministries. This team must be heavily invested in, including specialists in environmental and Indigenous affairs, to ensure thoroughness is never sacrificed for speed. Strategic investment in and leveraging of the Digital Twin Ontario initiative will create comprehensive virtual models of major projects, facilitating data-driven decision-making, enhancing predictive analysis, and supporting more efficient regulatory approvals. Building on this, project efficiency should also be strengthened with a public-facing online tracking system for all major project approvals, creating a centralized portal for a seamless user experience. The adoption of a concurrent approval and permitting process, supported by risk-based assessments, will allow various approval stages to run in parallel to significantly compress overall project timelines. To support this, clearer statutory timelines for all stages of approvals should be implemented, defining "stop-the-clock" events to ensure both agency accountability and transparency.

Recommendations on Fostering Genuine Indigenous Partnership and Economic Opportunity

Our recommendations also extend to fostering genuine Indigenous partnership and economic opportunity. All development processes must foster respectful engagement and true collaboration with Indigenous communities, explicitly recognizing their rights and interests. To support this, frameworks that promote Indigenous-led economic development should be established, including clear mechanisms for benefit-sharing from resource projects and supporting Indigenous capacity-building in the resource sector.

Recommendations on Upholding Standards for Sustainable Development, Including Special Economic Zones

Crucially, our perspective encompasses upholding high standards for sustainable development, particularly as we consider new tools like Special Economic Zones. Any expedited development processes must maintain, and where possible, enhance, high environmental protection standards. This includes leveraging innovation and best practices in environmental mitigation and rehabilitation, alongside robust requirements for long-term monitoring and site closure, reflecting a commitment to future generations. For Special Economic Zones (SEZs), clear criteria for their designation and operation must be developed and

publicly consulted on. This process must adhere to strict principles of clarity and transparency, specifying precise limits on any regulatory exemptions, and mandating robust mechanisms for local and Indigenous community input and ongoing accountability. Furthermore, it is crucial to explicitly confirm that all existing provincial labour and safety laws will apply fully within SEZs, ensuring no compromise on worker protection.

Recommendations on Strengthening Northern Investment Climate and Workforce Development

Finally, to truly unlock Northern Ontario's potential, we must also focus on strengthening our investment climate and workforce development. Strategic infrastructure investments (such as roads and energy grids) must be prioritized to enable responsible resource development across Northern Ontario. In parallel, targeted workforce development programs should be developed in collaboration with industry and educational institutions, ensuring Northern Ontarians are prepared for jobs created by new projects.

Concluding Remarks

The Timmins Chamber believes these recommendations offer a pragmatic path forward. Their implementation will help build stronger public confidence and foster a truly sustainable and prosperous Northern Ontario for all.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of these vital matters. We welcome the opportunity to provide further clarification or answer any questions the Committee may have.

Yours sincerely,

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