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August 16, 2024

The Honourable Steven MacKinnon, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Labour
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister MacKinnon,

As the largest building supply association in Canada, representing more than 1,300 businesses from manufacturing to retail stores employing 27,000 staff, we are compelled to address the current rail labour dispute, and the impact that the slowdown, and a lock-out or strike, would have upon our members. To that end, we urgently request that you use the powers granted to you to ensure no lockout occurs

We understand that the preferred method is a negotiated agreement satisfactory to both the employers and the union. However, given the slowdown that is underway in rail delivery, and how closely we are to August 22nd, we urge you to intervene. Given the impasse between the various parties, your intervention is necessary for the well-being of the Canadian economy.

A lock-out or a strike would have a devastating impact upon the lumber and building material sector; such scenarios would imperil the movement of goods and by extension, the numerous people employed in the sector.

The supply chain disruption that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic was tremendously disruptive to the Canadian economy, and businesses are in many cases still recovering from that period. A shut down by the two large rail networks in Canada could not come at more precarious time.

At a time when Canadians are experiencing an affordability and housing crisis, a rail shut down could be catastrophic.

As Minister of Labour, section 107 of the Canada Labour Code provides you with the following ability: "The Minister, where the Minister deems it expedient, may do such things as to the Minister seem likely to maintain or secure industrial peace and to promote conditions favourable to the settlement of industrial disputes or differences and to those ends the Minister may refer any question to the Board or direct the Board to do such things as the Minister deems necessary."

There is very recent precedent for this, as your predecessor utilized this power in June, in relation to Westjet mechanics and the employer.

We would urge you to do everything within your ability to ensure that Canada's railways continue to function, for the continued viability of businesses across the country.

Sincerely,

Liz Kovach



CC: The Honourable Wab Kinew, Premier of Manitoba
The Honourable Scott Moe, Premier of Saskatchewan
The Honourable Danielle Smith, Premier of Alberta

