



14 March 2016

Statement from the Bermuda Chamber of Commerce President, John Wight

Immigration Reform

“Immigration Reform, and Government’s Pathway to Status, is a very critical issue for all of Bermuda. This response reflects the Chamber’s role to represent the interests of our members.

The Chamber believes that getting our economy and our community back on track should be the focus of our collective efforts. Legislation has been introduced to provide more permanence to guest workers who have met minimum threshold limits of residency in Bermuda. We are very sensitive to the emotion in our community over this issue. There are many struggling businesses and unemployed persons who, through no fault of their own, are barely surviving and are having difficulty supporting themselves and their families. We also recognise that there are deep rooted feelings, based on historic amendments to immigration policies that have adversely impacted certain segments of our community.

It may understandably be illogical to feel that the proposed legislation will improve the situation. The reality is however that with an ageing Bermudian population, and with the disturbing trend of more people drawing upon Government’s bank account than paying into it, Bermuda must increase the numbers of people contributing to the system through increased employment and population expansion. More people working and living on island equates to more economic activity.

We have been very clear and consistent in our message; Chamber members, who represent all sectors of the business community, small, medium, and large, need more people in Bermuda to sell their goods and services to. Several of our members have been struggling for many years. The only way for these companies to measurably improve their economic circumstances is to generate more volume of sales, which can only occur if we have more people in Bermuda.

The discussion therefore should not be ‘if’ Bermuda needs more residents. The discussion needs to be around how do we address the real and current needs in the community, increase the numbers of residents, benefit our economy and ensure the economic success of both current and new residents. In addition, one part of the solution we believe, has to be to attract many of those Bermudians who have left, to come back home and to prosper in a growing economy.

With the Chamber’s mission being to “cultivate the best environment in which all businesses can prosper”, the Executive Board of the Chamber of Commerce supports the concept of the proposed immigration reform legislation but stresses that there must be simultaneous measures taken to address the social needs of the community to ensure its success for all sectors of Bermuda.”

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