During Small Business Week, BIABC Urges Province to Match Words with Action on Liquor Policy

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Vancouver, BC – As communities across the province celebrate **Small Business Week (October 19–25)**, the Business Improvement Areas of British Columbia (BIABC) is calling on the provincial government to pair its recognition of small business with concrete policy action - starting with modernizing BC's outdated liquor rules.

Small Business Week is a time to rally behind the entrepreneurs who give BC communities their vibrancy and character. However, the Association is also advocating a number of practical measures that would strengthen small business resilience, including:

- A tariff response plan that expands the Buy BC Program and local sourcing opportunities & removing interprovincial trade barriers to improve market access.
- Address chronic offenders – violent and non-violent – through stronger bail and sentencing conditions to improve community safety.
- Advance a clear red-tape reduction agenda to cut costs and boost efficiency.
- Offset the costs of mandatory five-day paid sick leave, which require businesses to pay both employees and backfill costs.

There is also one significant and longstanding issue that was exposed during the BCGEU strike – BC's liquor policy supply chain. Under current rules, restaurants and pubs must purchase all alcohol through the BC Liquor Distribution Branch (BCLDB), leaving them without alternative supply options during disruptions. A 2018 Business Technical Advisory Panel on Liquor Policy recommended allowing restaurants to buy directly from private stores — a straightforward administrative change that remains unimplemented.

"Acknowledging small businesses is important, but the government also has practical tools at its disposal that would make a real difference," said Jeremy Heighton, President of BIABC. "Allowing direct purchases from private liquor stores would provide supply resilience, reduce costs, and send a clear signal that the province is serious about supporting small businesses."

Of the more than 15,000 restaurants operating in BC, over 90% are small businesses, many of them independent, family-run operations. These businesses are especially vulnerable to supply disruptions and rising costs.

The liquor policy issue comes at a time when small businesses are grappling with **unprecedented economic pressures**, as highlighted by a recent BIABC survey:

- **95%** of businesses report rising costs over the past five years, with nearly half facing increases of more than **20%.**
- **61%** report declining profit margins.
- **39%** don't believe they can continue operating successfully beyond two years, and more than half only see a four-year runway.

Top cost drivers include payroll and benefits (70%), cost of goods (58%), leases or mortgages (50%), insurance (49%), and property taxes (45%).

BIABC is also urging British Columbians to show their support for small businesses by shopping directly with them.

"When you shop local, you're doing more than making a purchase - you're investing in families, supporting local jobs, and strengthening the heartbeat of your neighbourhood," said Heighton. "Now is the time to show up for the businesses that show up for our communities every day."

About BIABC
The Business Improvement Areas of BC (BIABC) is the provincial champion of strong, vibrant, and successful downtowns, main streets, and commercial districts throughout the province. Its members represent more than 80 business districts, employing hundreds of thousands of retail, service, and office workers.

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