BIABC Outlines Priorities Ahead of February 17 Provincial Budget

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Vancouver, BC - With the provincial budget set to be tabled on February 17, the association representing most of the province's 80 BIAs and roughly 55,000 businesses in British Columbia says the upcoming fiscal plan will play an important role in reinforcing confidence at a time of continued economic uncertainty.

The Business Improvement Areas of British Columbia (BIABC) acknowledges the challenging fiscal environment facing the province, including mounting cost pressures and difficult trade-offs identified by the Minister of Finance. At the same time, BIABC says the budget presents an opportunity to demonstrate that small businesses remain a clear and consistent priority.

"Small businesses understand that government is facing real fiscal constraints," said Jeremy Heighton, President of BIABC. "At the same time, they are looking for clarity, stability, and signs that practical steps are being taken to support local economies during a period of uncertainty. That balance will shape how this budget is received."

BIABC says the upcoming budget is an opportunity to advance measured, targeted actions that strengthen economic resilience, protect communities, and help small businesses manage cumulative cost pressures - without losing sight of the province's broader fiscal realities.

Priority 1: A Coordinated, Balanced Approach to Safety and Repeat Offenders

Public safety remains a significant concern for small businesses across British Columbia. Both violent incidents and persistent repeat non-violent crime continue to affect day-to-day operations in business districts, with many of these challenges closely linked to untreated mental health issues, addiction, and housing instability.

BIABC is encouraging a coordinated, province-wide approach that balances enforcement with prevention and treatment, including:

- Improved access to long-term mental health and addiction treatment services.
- Measures that strengthen accountability for repeat offenders, including those involved in chronic non-violent crime.

- Continued investment in effective community-based enforcement programs, such as the Community Safety and Targeted Enforcement Program (C-STEP), alongside security infrastructure and collaboration between police and local business districts.
- Restoration of the Securing Small Business Rebate Program, with streamlined application processes to ensure more businesses can access support to offset vandalism and property-crime costs.

Priority 2: Providing Greater Certainty on Tariffs and Trade Impacts

Small businesses await the tariff-response strategy the provincial government committed to releasing last summer. Ongoing uncertainty around tariffs has contributed to rising costs and supply-chain challenges, particularly for small and independent operators with limited capacity to absorb shocks.

BIABC believes there remains an opportunity for government to advance cost-effective measures that strengthen business resilience and reduce exposure to external pressures. This includes fostering a stronger domestic marketplace by expanding local sourcing opportunities, enhancing the Buy BC program, and supporting businesses in identifying new domestic and international market opportunities.

Looking Ahead

BIABC acknowledges the fiscal realities facing the province and understands the difficult choices reflected in the upcoming budget. At the same time, the Association says there remain several issues that require ongoing, structured engagement with government - including the rising cost of doing business, and the need for stable and predictable support for the community events which deliver significant economic and community benefits across British Columbia.

The elimination of the Small Business Roundtable has created a gap in formal, ongoing engagement at the provincial level. BIABC continues to advocate for consistent and informed small-business input into policy decisions, through a stand-alone Ministry of State for Small Business.

"This budget is an opportunity to reinforce confidence and demonstrate a shared commitment to vibrant local economies," said Heighton. "Small businesses recognize the fiscal realities government faces, and they are ready to work collaboratively - provided there is a clear avenue to continue those conversations - so communities and small businesses across British Columbia can thrive."

About BIABC
The Business Improvement Areas of British Columbia (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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Media Contact:
Kelly Gleeson
kgleeson@lbmg.ca
604-240-6231