



DATE: December 2, 2020
TO: Senate Economic and Small Business Development Committee
FROM: Ryan Tarrant, President & CEO, Bay Area Chamber of Commerce
SUBJECT: Senate Bills 1215, 1216, 1217, 1218

Thank you Chairman Horn and members of the committee. My name is Ryan Tarrant and I serve as President & CEO of the Bay Area Chamber of Commerce.

For years, the business community has supported infrastructure improvements in Michigan. Our state's economic competitiveness, job creation and the health and safety of citizens depends on the implementation of strategies to construct and maintain safe, reliable and affordable infrastructure. Unfortunately, Michigan's infrastructure repair needs greatly exceed the available public funding at all levels of government.

Now more than ever, many cities in our state have few resources and even fewer options for critical infrastructure needs when state or federal funding is not available. In many cases, cities are forced to close or restrict access to infrastructure when financing options are not available.

Bay City has seen a revival in the past decade. Once a community known primarily for its Fourth of July Festival, hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested into development and redevelopment in the area. People from the region and state are now just as likely to visit Bay City for one of its restaurants, a day of shopping or to access the waterfront. We must have safe and reliable infrastructure to continue this trend.

In the midst of this pandemic, we are seeing a renewed push to support our small businesses, which has been a primary factor in every recovery from a recession dating back to the 1970s. Last Saturday were annual Shop Local campaigns in cities around the state, which this year took on more importance than ever after eight months of on-again, off-again restrictions that have crippled many businesses. But, for small businesses in Bay City, one Saturday pales in comparison to the impact this package of bills will have on economic development in Bay County.

In a town separated by the Saginaw River, the ability to traverse these bridges is imperative. Both the Midland Street and Downtown Business Districts are at the foot of the Liberty Bridge,

while Bangor Township, Bay County's largest township and with a significant business presence of its own, is found near Independence Bridge. Countless small businesses have thrived in these locations because their customers are able to conveniently access them.

The loss of even one of these bridges will have a significant negative impact on the local economy. In our Midland Street Business District, we have small business owners who chose to open Mode's Tavern during the summer of 2020. By all accounts, Mode's Tavern is a phenomenal success, with the owners finding creative ways to safely distance customers both indoors and out. But, where a potential customer was once able to access Midland Street businesses by way of Liberty Bridge from the east side of the river in minutes, they will find more convenient ways to spend their disposable income and this burgeoning small business will have one more obstacle to success.

And, the closure of Independence Bridge would be catastrophic. Located near the end of M-15, Independence Bridge connects I-75 from Clarkston to Wilder Road, funneling traffic through Bay City, Bangor Township and numerous small towns along the way as travelers make their way north. And, from a public health and safety perspective, the loss of Independence Bridge would create a logistical nightmare, with ambulances, police and fire losing precious minutes in response time.

These bills will provide a solution that creates jobs, maintains public health and safety, and is funded through private investment with zero impact to local or state spending.

I offer my strong support for Senate Bills 1215-1218 and urge you to pass this legislation.