August 20, 2020.

Att. Hon. Bill Blair, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness,
Bill.Blair@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister Blair,

CIFFA has recently written to the federal labour minister, The Hon. Filomena Tassi, with regard to the strike situation at Canada’s second largest port, the Port of Montreal, between the Maritime Employers Association (MEA) and its longshoremen and checkers’ unions.

This action, ongoing now for several weeks, has a direct and significant impact to the Canadian economy and for the workers in many Canadian industries and CIFFA is seized by the lack of concrete resolution on this issue by the federal government.

As we indicated to Minister Tassi, this is not a normal year, where government officials can stand back and have “faith in the collective bargaining process”. This has been an outstanding issue since October 2018 and cannot be allowed to fester any longer.

First and foremost, the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in the deepest economic downturn of our lifetimes. Trade in Canada has plummeted, while unemployment figures increase. Trade has been severely disrupted and a key challenge for government officials will be to lay the foundation for a strong, sustainable and economic recovery.

On May 19, 2020, Public Safety Canada issued a guidance document on Essential Services and Functions in Canada During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Canada’s National Strategy for Critical Infrastructure is defined as “the processes, systems, facilities, technologies, networks, assets, and services essential to the health, safety, security or economic well-being of Canadians and the effective functioning of government. Ten sectors were identified, including Transportation.

Essential transportation workers are defined as workers supporting or enabling transportation functions in any transportation mode (i.e. road, air, rail, marine), in support of the continues essential movement of goods and people, in circumstances where non-essential travel is restricted. For greater clarity, this includes but is not limited to:

- Maritime transportation workers, including those in the commercial shipping sector who ensure the continuity of operations and the fluidity of commercial shipping, such as vessel crew, port workers, mariners, equipment operators,
longshoremen, sailors, marine pilots, marine agents, representatives of foreign ship owners, maintenance workers, tug captains and others.

It must be stressed that we have not yet emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic, and that the issuance of policy and guidance around Essential Services and Functions must not be put aside at this time in order to let a labour situation remain at an impasse and hold multiple industry supply chains hostage, cause undue delays and stress to the supply chain and continue to cripple the economy. We are aware today that the situation has even devolved into ridiculous scenarios of determining which container contents contain “essential goods” or not, before they are moved or left.

At this time, holding supply chains hostage, causing undue stress on industries, creating new costs via diversions and surcharges, and frustrating the end consumers of goods, not to mention crippling Canada economically and its reputation as a trading nation, is untenable.

We wish to highlight your commitment to defining and honouring essential services, workers and processes and we ask you to bring this untenable strike situation to a swift conclusion.

Regards,

Bruce Rodgers       Executive Director, CIFFA

Julia Kuzeljevich   Public Affairs Manager, CIFFA

The Canadian International Freight Forwarders Association (CIFFA) represents some 260 regular member firms from the largest of global multi-national freight forwarding firms to small and medium sized Canadian companies. CIFFA member companies employ tens of thousands of highly skilled international trade and transportation specialists. As a vital component of Canada’s global supply chain, member firms of the Canadian International Freight Forwarders Association (CIFFA) facilitate the movement of goods around the world. Freight forwarders provide a vital link in Canada’s global supply chains, enhancing export capabilities and assisting in the delivery of competitive solutions to Canada’s importing and exporting communities.

CC: The Right Honorable Justin Trudeau

Prime Minister of Canada

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