

The St. Lucia Chamber of Commerce Industry and Agriculture, having taken note of the outstanding work of the Ministry of Health and the Government of Saint Lucia and having noted the pattern of developments of the COVID-19 virus reaffirms its commitment to work with the Government and people of Saint Lucia in this fight against the spread of this disease.

The continued advancement of plans as set out by the Government, particularly the advancement of some of the phase three measures is heartening. Moreover, the contributions from social partners, the Medical and Dental Association, the Bankers' Association, the Bakers' Association, the Church and the Leader of the Opposition, have given the Chamber the confidence that our nation is approaching this challenge in the required unified mode. As such, the Chamber has consulted further with its key members and other private sector organizations, as well as the Prime Minister and the Chief Medical Officer. Having got their support we propose the following:

- Saint Lucia institute a more aggressive social distancing program which will call for the reduction in non-essential commercial activity for a 14 day period to facilitate heightened social distancing. The Chamber is of the view that this preemptive action which many private sector partner agencies have endorsed will be a major step in impeding the spread of the disease on island. Additionally, it will allow the identification of any infected persons, facilitate easier containment and tracking, while reducing the pressure on the health system.
- The Chamber suggests, inter alia, the following types of activity be classified as "essential commercial activity" and as such be permitted to continue operation, (with specific guidelines where required):

Health Service Providers

Security services

Public Transportation

Operation of Bakeries

Accommodation and associated support services

Supermarket, pharmacy and Food Retail operations

Banking Services and Cash Transfer Services (ATM replenishment)

Distribution of goods and essentials to small shops

Restaurants and Fast Food (delivery and carry out only)

Solid Waste Disposal

Utility Services (water, telecommunications, electricity services)

Petrol Stations

Manufacturing of food, feed and beverages (water and juices)

Shipping/Import and related services (broker, truckers, etc.)

Courier Services

It is understood that alongside the above, there will be need for a certain level of Government or public services e.g.

Port

Customs

Health

Security

Meanwhile, Government should also move to quickly ensure that the relevant Statutory Instruments are given effect to address (1) sick leave for daily paid and self- quarantined and medically isolated workers, (2) extend the deadline for filing taxes, both corporate and personal, (3) extend the deadline for making NIC payments, (4) eliminate associated penalties for late payment of the foregoing.

This situation has exposed the need to (1) ensure that the NIC institute facilities for delivery of services online including the acceptance of online payment of NIC contributions as a matter of urgency, (2) that the Customs & Excise Department operationalize the existing ASCYUDA World module that allows the submission of online entries and supporting documents eliminating the need for the physical copies to be delivered to Customs.

The Chamber is aware that much effort is required to operationalize this “reduction in non- essential commercial activity for a 14 day period to facilitate heightened social distancing” proposal and stands prepared to work with NEMAC and Government to so do.

Saint Lucia does not have to wait to take sensible proven measures that will mitigate the impact of COVID-19. As a nation we must continue to work assiduously to limit the impact and infection by the virus on our huge high risk population segments. Social Distancing measures have proven to be effective and crucial in controlling the spread and widespread infection of a populations by the virus. Saint Lucia, based on our limited resources should at this time be working to stay ahead of the curve and leap frog the virus infection process. We do not want to have to play catch up.

The Chamber is encouraging our members, within their own means to consider utilizing paid leave, either voluntary or otherwise during the two week period, where possible. We also encourage members to explore and use work from home/ remote approaches as another strategy.

There will be, serious economic and business fall out. We may not be in any position to control this aspect. However, we are in position to positively affect and mitigate against the health fallout. Being aggressive and proactive holds major positive benefits with minimal downside risks. In fact, on the contrary being too slow and late with our response has few and minimal benefits and the risks associated can be catastrophic for our people.

We remain convinced that Government must play a significant role along with the business community in minimizing social dislocation. We must do everything within our control to protect and take care of the most vulnerable in our community. This can only be accomplished through cooperation and collaboration. We believe that we must tackle the ‘people issues’ first. We therefore encourage our members to conduct

their internal stress tests to understand what capacity and capabilities they possess, to extend themselves in a difficult environment.

We will commence work on the support measures for which the business community may require Government support , but mean while we solicit NEMAC's support for this measure to be agreed on and implemented ASAP.