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Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the need and importance of Bill 119 for the Construction Industry.

First, let me introduce myself.

My name is Heather Cruickshanks and I am the President of Merit Contractors Association of Nova Scotia. We are an open-shop (non-union) Association.

Currently we represent 145 Companies and 1,300 employees in Mainland Nova Scotia. Merit not only advocates on behalf of the open-shop, it also provides both benefits and pensions.

Further, I sit on the Construction Association of Nova Scotia Board as a contractor. What really pays the bills is the 34 years I have worked in the construction industry as the owner of a Mechanical contracting company.

My husband and I started our HVAC business in the backyard of our North End home in Halifax. We worked hard and struggled to make our company what it is today. Currently we employ almost 40 tradespeople and office staff. WE are not any different than many other small businesses.

Nova Scotia's construction industry is made up of many small and medium sized businesses. There are not many, if any, contractors that have not been impacted by delayed payments or non-payments at one point or another.

When payment is withheld from a company, it can mean the difference between making payroll or not. Jobs are at risk. Futures are at risk.

On a personal note I can tell you that is exactly what happened to our Company in the 90's. If not for the ability to remortgage our home and put the money into the business, we would have been finished and jobs would have been lost.

Unfortunately, the same thing happened again in 2002. Thankfully, that time, we did not have to remortgage our house again.

We are careful who we do work for, but there are no guarantees and many businesses are not in a position to turn away work.

Now, we have an opportunity to fix something that is broken.

Something that can help businesses in Nova Scotia thrive.

It is not unreasonable to expect payment after work has been carried out. Why should a customer be able to withhold money for work that has been completed? At present, there is not much we can do to stop them. Going through the legal system is an option but this has its own delays and obstacles.

The hardship created by nonpayment or delayed payment is one that most small business just cannot afford.

Unfortunately, more and more, Subcontractors are being used by clients as a bank.

They intentionally delay the request for financing and make the General Contractors and Subcontractors wait. Sometimes the wait is months which increases the financing costs to the Contractors.

This is the time to be proactive with the legislation and help stop needless losses of both jobs and companies.

This is something that all parties should embrace.

Please do not make this a political football. Our industry needs this legislation to help us grow and create a stable environment for those who are in it today as well as the next generation.

We are the industry. We want and need this. The time is now.

Thank you.

*Deborah Amick*