

**Mr. Wadih Fares (President and Chief Executive Officer, W.M. Fares Group)
at the Citizenship and Immigration Committee**

On June 19th, 2017.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen.

As was mentioned, my name is Wadih Fares. I am the president and CEO of W.M. Fares Group, a real estate design and development firm in Halifax. With me today is Suzanne Ley, executive director of Nova Scotia Office of Immigration. It is an honour and privilege to appear here today to speak on a topic near and dear to my heart: immigration.

I am an immigrant. More than 30 years ago I left Lebanon to come to Nova Scotia to study. Upon receiving my citizenship, I became a Canadian living in Nova Scotia. Today I am a Nova Scotian choosing to live and work in Nova Scotia.

I strongly believe immigrants add immediate and long-term value to our businesses and communities. They bring new points of view, new ideas, and new ways of doing things. They create a stronger, more robust economy. They help us grow our population, build our province, and make Nova Scotia a vibrant, dynamic society. For all these reasons, immigration is critical to the future success and sustainability of Nova Scotia. That is why in 2014 I accepted an invitation from Premier Stephen McNeil to co-chair his advisory council on immigration.

I am pleased to be here today to share my perspective on the opportunities, the challenges, and what action by the federal government is required to advance Nova Scotia's immigration priorities and initiatives.

We have spent a lot of time over the past couple of years in discussions with the federal government to increase the number of immigrants coming to Nova Scotia. We have met with all officials and stakeholders. We have sat with ministers and staff and all the decision-makers, and the result is that we are making progress. Together and with the strong leadership of our minister, Minister Lena Diab, and her staff, we are achieving results in Nova Scotia.

In 2016 it was a record year for immigration in Nova Scotia, and 2017 is shaping up to be another successful year. Last year we welcomed nearly 5,500 new people to our province, the highest number of immigrants since the Second World War. That increase was due to the strength of our provincial nominee program, as well as our response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Nova Scotia welcomed over 1,500 Syrian refugees through government-assisted, private, and blended sponsorships. This is a significant increase compared with previous years in which our province typically resettled only about 200 refugees.

Not only is it important that we bring more immigrants to the province, it is also important that we provide the settlement and community support to allow them to stay and integrate into the life of the province. I am pleased to say that overall, newcomers to Nova Scotia are doing well. They are twice as likely to work in their profession than in almost every other province. According to data compiled by the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia, 71% of immigrant

businesses in Nova Scotia will still be open after three years, compared to the Canadian average of 48%. Rates of employment insurance used by immigrants in our province are lower than in Canada overall, and about 87.5% of Nova Scotia nominees between 2011 and 2016 were employed.

We have a strong network of settlement services throughout the province to support the integration of newcomers through language, employment bridging, workplace culture, employer engagement, family crisis, and computer and technical training programs. The most recent data available in 2014 shows that 73% of people who landed in Nova Scotia between 2009 and 2013 were still living here. In the early 2000s less than half were staying. That's a big improvement, and the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration will continue to support these programs.

Another recent success was the launch of the Atlantic immigration pilot this past March. As you are aware, it is part of the federal government's Atlantic growth strategy.

The Atlantic pilot is a significant opportunity for Nova Scotia, which will help employers hire foreign workers and international graduates. We hear from Nova Scotia businesses that one of the main challenges they have for growth is lack of staff. The Atlantic pilot provides an opportunity for Nova Scotia businesses to address these labour gaps.

We are encouraged by the Atlantic immigration pilot and its many positive attributes: flexibility around criteria, the speed of processing, the focus on retention, and the numbers. So far, 209 employers in Nova Scotia have applied for designation, and of those, 123 have already been granted designation. We are very optimistic about the program's early success.

In my role as a premier adviser, I hear from employers that immigration is complicated and time-consuming. Some employers are not aware of immigration as a tool for addressing ongoing labour gaps. That is why the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration will assist employers in navigating the immigration system and maximizing the opportunities available with immigration. One of the unexpected benefits of the Atlantic immigration pilot is that more employers will learn about the benefits of using immigration as a tool to fill persistent labour-market needs. All programs can benefit.

Because of the interest generated in the Atlantic immigration pilot and our provincial government's ability to work with employers.

Source: Open Parliament, Citizen and Immigration Committee

<https://openparliament.ca/committees/immigration/42-1/68/wadih-fares-1/only/>