6 June 2020

Smt Nirmala Sitharaman
Honorable Finance Minister
Government of India

Dear Smt Nirmala Sitharaman ji,

As governments at every level across the India continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and focus on economic recovery, many companies are seeking harmonised guidance to safely reopen workplaces across India while protecting public health.

In this context, I am pleased to share with you **ITI's guidance on reopening workplaces in India.** As the global association of the tech industry, ITI represents the entire spectrum of technology: from internet companies, to hardware and networking equipment manufacturers, to software developers. We are convinced that public-private sector collaboration will be critical to safely reopening workplaces in a manner that ensures the trust and confidence of employees and places India on a path to a prosperous recovery.

Coordination of guidance throughout India is crucial in order to avoid a patchwork of state policies that could delay economic recovery. The Central Government can play a pivotal role in developing and providing such guidance. India's guidelines should focus on assessing readiness; health monitoring; transmission mitigation techniques; and employee support. Central and state governments should also regularly review and modify the guidance as appropriate, given the evolving nature of the pandemic.

ITI is committed to serving as a resource for policymakers, and we look forward to collaborating with you and your team in the transition out of this unprecedented crisis. We stand ready to support you in developing a successful transition towards reopening the workplaces and remain at your disposal to discuss this further.

Yours Sincerely,

Jason Oxman,
President and CEO

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<u>**REQUEST FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORKPLACE REOPENING GUIDELINES**</u>

The Information Technology Industry (ITI) Council appreciates the continued efforts by federal, state, and local officials around the world to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus and to develop and execute plans for reopening the global economy. We understand the importance of balancing public health measures and safely reopening workplaces across the country, and that there will be no universal date for all workers to return to physical work locations. As we look to move from the response phase into the economic recovery phase in each jurisdiction where we work, employers and employees alike will need clear guidance on how to resume workplace operations while mitigating the risk of a resurgence of the virus.

Consistent, scientific, and data-driven recommendations to protect workers and workplaces are key to ensuring employers, employees, and customers have confidence in the safety of their environments to return to normal economic activity. It is important that guidance be localized according to local community conditions, however, many of these questions cut across geographies and prompt universal solutions. We encourage harmonization of these efforts in order to avoid a patchwork of national policies that will cause needless, time-consuming, and resource-draining confusion that will delay our national economic recovery.

ITI believes coordinated measures across central, state and local governments are needed to keep employers, employees, and customers safe. ITI requests that governments around the world seek to develop enhanced guidelines focused on (1) assessing readiness; (2) health monitoring; (3) transmission mitigation techniques; and (4) employee support. We must recognize that today's pandemic is evolving, and we therefore urge global harmonization and consistency, as well as regular review and modification of this guidance as appropriate. These guidelines will aid businesses of all sizes, across all industries – including the tech sector – and in all localities determine the healthiest path to reopening workplaces.

Assessing Readiness

Assessing readiness: As employers around the world begin to reopen, many are faced with the question of how to evaluate whether their workplace is ready for the safe return of employees, customers, and vendors. Providing workplace readiness guidance that includes a checklist of considerations prior to reopening would enhance employee and consumer confidence while mitigating transmission of the virus. At a minimum, the checklist should include assessment of entry controls, social distancing practices, cleaning protocols, building services, and communications. We appreciate the Government of India's already extensive reopening protocols and guidance. This guidance should strongly encourage landlords of commercial properties to utilize the readiness assessment and to work collaboratively with their tenants/business owners.

Health Monitoring

COVID-19 screening: There are myriad COVID-19 screening techniques under consideration across governments and private sector. General guidance on which screening methods, techniques, and

technologies can be reliably used in particular work environments would encourage the widest possible deployment of employer-based screening. Should equipment be required for any of these screening methods, guidance on models or functions, and alternatives in the event of supply challenges, will be helpful to employers across all sectors. Additionally, according to many reports, a majority of individuals infected with the COVID-19 virus are asymptomatic. Employers and employees will benefit from guidance on effective screening measures to limit exposure among their workforce and the public from asymptomatic persons. Lastly, screening techniques in some circumstances may generate important data points of interest to public health authorities, necessitating guidelines that allow for and ensure limited, use-specific data sharing with public health officials in a manner that protects individual privacy.

COVID-19 testing: Epidemiological and medical experts broadly agree that widespread testing is necessary to truly mitigate and contain further outbreaks until a reliable vaccine is commonly available across the globe. In many geographies, however, testing availability or testing guidelines remain a challenge to widespread testing. Any testing guidance should be flexible to give companies the ability to adopt testing measures based on the safety needs of their workforce. As testing capacity increases, guidance should encourage widespread testing, including of those who are asymptomatic. Employers may be incentivized to develop their own ongoing testing regimes to benefit the health of all employees; such employer-administered testing programs will aid the national effort to increase testing capacity as well as mitigate the spread of the virus through increased data sets and data sharing. Guidance around creating employer-administered programs should avoid discouraging private sector innovation and investment in testing or expanding capacity.

Transmission Mitigation Techniques

Physical changes to office environments to enable social distancing: Today's workplace designs are often incompatible with social distancing guidelines and retrofitting workplaces will both prove costly and take time. Employers and employees will benefit from space planning guidance, such as how to reconfigure cubical or open workspace environments, and how to appropriately mitigate transmission risk in shared spaces such as elevators, meeting rooms, kitchens, break rooms, cafeterias, locker rooms, and restrooms.

Alternative mitigation strategies where social distancing is infeasible: Some workspaces may not lend themselves to retrofitting, in which case employers and employees will benefit from guidance on mitigation techniques such as employing rotating shifts or work weeks, installing physical barriers, using face coverings, or altering air and foot traffic flow. Additionally, some job functions entirely prevent social distancing and other situations exist where social distancing may make a job function more dangerous to employees (e.g., moving or delivering heavy merchandise or equipment). Employers and employees will benefit from enhanced guidance on additional mitigation techniques that may be employed where social distancing is impractical.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) or face coverings: Many public health officials urge or require workers to utilize cloth masks if they work in a non-healthcare setting and PPE is not otherwise

required. Employers and employees will benefit from guidance on who is responsible for providing PPE or face coverings, and whether an employer may require employees to provide their own face coverings in an environment that does not require PPE. If employee-provided, however, guidance must clarify if employers are obligated to verify whether the face coverings conform to particular public health guidelines or any other requirements.

High risk or vulnerable employees: Many public health guidance recommends identifying workers who are "at a particularly high risk" of contracting COVID-19. Employers and employees will benefit from clear guidance on how this risk profiling should occur; identify related privacy obligations that arise; describe what responsibilities, accommodations, or protocols particularly susceptible employees trigger; and how to encourage these individuals to appropriately protect themselves.

Sanitation and disinfectant protocols: Employers and employees will benefit from detailed guidance on sanitation and disinfectant protocols as offices reopen and after a confirmed COVID-19 exposure occurs.

In-person gathering restrictions: Many industries and individual companies plan years or months in advance for meetings and gatherings of all sizes. In addition, meetings are a keystone of innovative and professional cultures. Clear guidance on what restrictions on in-person gatherings will persist will benefit employers, employees, and attendees alike.

Contact tracing: Contact tracing in both employment and social circumstances is an essential tool to mitigate and contain outbreaks. There are robust efforts underway around the world to design and deploy contact tracing and self-reported symptom applications. Coordinated guidance is necessary to coalesce around a clear set of protocols for the timely collection, processing, and sharing of data among private entities and federal, state, and local public health agencies – as well as across borders- to enable necessary interoperability and data sharing among bordering states and closely situated localities. Employers and employees will benefit from clear guidance on what records employers should maintain to support contact tracing efforts; how, when, and with whom those records should be shared; how and when to notify employees of a potential exposure; and properly addressing privacy risks or obligations that arise from this activity.

Compliance: Finally, mitigation techniques are only effective if they are deployed widely and consistently. Employers and employees alike will benefit from clear guidance on how to best encourage and ensure compliance with public-health driven guidelines by employees and customers.

Employee Support

Immigration guidance: Employers and employees alike are facing unexpected immigration challenges due to unprecedented restrictions on international travel. Due to COVID-19, employees whose work authorization expired or will soon expire, and who are unable to travel home or to an office in another country, face unavoidable visa overstays, loss of income, and other important benefits, resulting in significant legal uncertainty. Employers and employees will benefit from

immediate but temporary government flexibility regarding immigration status and compliance deadlines.

Balancing health and safety and COVID-19 related family circumstances: Whether employees live with someone who has a higher susceptibility to COVID-19 complications or they support minor dependents whose school or daycare remain closed, many employees will not be able to return to a workplace upon re-opening. Employers and employees alike will benefit from guidance on how to balance workplace re-openings, health and safety concerns, and COVID-19 family circumstances.