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Honourable Tim Houston
Premier of Nova Scotia
7th Floor, One Government House
1700 Granville St
Halifax, NS B3J 2T3

Via email: Premier@NovaScotia.ca

January 13, 2022

Re: COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave Relaunch

Dear Premier Houston,

The province's recent decision to relaunch the COVID-19 paid sick leave program is a step in the right direction. Since the very start of the pandemic, workers have been calling on governments across the country to ensure they do not have to choose between sustaining their livelihoods and doing the responsible thing by self-isolating when they feel sick. Unifor members have experienced firsthand the tragic impact of having to work on the frontlines of the pandemic, with too many members having fallen ill or even succumbing to the virus.

However, Nova Scotia's relaunched paid sick leave program, which will be retroactive to December 22, 2021 and last until March 31, 2022, simply isn't enough to protect workers and their workplaces from this latest, unprecedented surge in COVID-19 cases driven by the Omicron variant. For one, the program is entirely voluntary for employers, and many employers will merely opt to forego the administrative burden of having to front sick pay to their workers and apply for reimbursement afterwards.

Secondly, the program stipulates that workers can only access the benefit if they are absent from work for less than half of their scheduled work week. While this is clearly meant to ensure that workers can only access the program if they are not eligible for the federal Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB) (which requires workers to be absent for 50% or more of the work week), many workers cannot afford to wait to apply for the CRSB nor is the application process easy to navigate.

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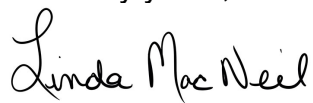
The advantage of a paid sick leave program is that workers continue to receive their regular pay and do not have to file an application for remuneration down the road, which leads to far less hesitation when weighing the need to self-isolate. Moreover, the 50% rule arbitrarily punishes those Nova Scotians who fall ill or begin to self-isolate during the start of their work week. We should be making it easier for workers to do the right thing, rather than unjustifiably forcing them to work at least 50% of their weekly hours – potentially while ill – in order to receive sick pay.

Finally, workers in Nova Scotia need greater sick pay coverage and they need a permanent, mandatory program in place. Canadian provinces are far behind most of their international peers when it comes to ensuring that workers are not compelled to choose between their incomes and staying home when ill. The federal government's recent decision to legislate ten paid days of sick leave should serve as an example for the province.

Premier, I call on you to improve the COVID-19 sick leave program by making it mandatory, removing the 50% rule, and increasing coverage to ten days, while extending the temporary program until at least the end of 2022 so that preparations can be made to legislate a permanent, mandatory paid sick leave program in Nova Scotia. I also call on the province to actively participate in any consultations with the federal government on how to make ten days of paid sick leave universal for all jurisdictions in Canada.

Implementing a mandatory, permanent paid sick leave program is the right thing to do for public health and it's the right thing to do to protect Nova Scotians, especially during this pandemic. I urge you to act now.

Sincerely yours,



Linda MacNeil
Unifor Atlantic Regional Director

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