Unifor Remarks to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

Study of Bill S-244 (An Act to Amend the Department of Employment and Social Development Act and the Employment Insurance Act (Employment Insurance Council))

February 15, 2024

# Unifor

Good afternoon Chair, members of the Committee, and Honourable Senators.

On behalf of National President Lana Payne, I want to extend our sincere appreciation for the invitation to speak with you today, on behalf of Unifor. My name is Erin Harrison, and I’m a national representative in Unifor’s Research department.

Unifor is Canada’s largest union in the private sector, representing 315,000 workers nationwide in virtually every major sector of the economy with 29 sectors, 696 local unions, and 2,883 bargaining units.

Unifor is dedicated to the issue of EI reform, as it concerns all working people, and particularly affects Unifor members working in fisheries and seasonal workers, among others.

# Build Better EI Campaign

Unifor has long advocated for permanent improvements to Canada’s Employment Insurance (EI) program – improvements that became all the more necessary following the COVID pandemic. Recently, in June of 2021, our union released a special policy paper entitled [Securing an Inclusive, Equitable and Resilient Employment Insurance Program for Workers in Canada](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unifortheunion/pages/3200/attachments/original/1623432997/Build_Back_Better-EI-EN.pdf?1623432997). In this paper, our union called on the federal government to make significant changes to the EI program and outlined concrete recom­mendations aimed at expanding eligibility, improving benefits and program administration.

Unifor is supportive of Bill S-244, as it directionally delivers on one of Unifor’s administrative policy recommendations, which aims to “renew support for tripartite dialogue between unions, employers and government on matters of EI and labour market transitional supports.”

## Bill S-244 Involvement

Unifor has served as a stakeholder participant in the development and dialogue pertaining to Bill S-244 with thanks to the author, Senator Diane Bellemare. Our union attended various meetings organized by Senator Bellemare and is proud of the collaborative process that was undertaken.

## Bill S-244 Support

With employers and workers being the sole contributors to Employment Insurance since 1990, Bill S-244 sets to renew the voice of these parties to the Employment Insurance Commission through a newly formed council structure.

The involvement of both the commissioners tasked with appointing members of the council from both labour organizations and employer organizers is key to Unifor’s support of such a structure.

Unifor believes that effective employment policies require the involvement of a broad range of non-governmental actors. This would allow for better collaboration among all involved parties, including helping to identify changing labour market conditions, skills gaps, and responding better to emerging workforce needs.

## The Road Ahead

The pandemic highlighted significant gaps in the EI program. Millions of Canadians lost their jobs and were not eligible for EI, despite paying into it for the duration of their work lives. Today, significant gaps and inefficiencies remain.

Unifor continues to be front and centre in assisting our membership on transitional supports for workers facing job dislocations.

Unifor has participated in every single consultation related to Employment Insurance that has been held by the federal government. However, a lack of action and delivery on commitments to modernize and improve EI for workers after the lessons learned throughout the pandemic has left many of our members frustrated – especially those faced with climate and sustainability-related job restructuring, in the resources, forestry sector, and auto sector, including those facing a transformational shift to electric vehicle production.

A voice at the table would amplify the situations faced by these workers, and bring their perspectives to the forefront of national decision-makers, and increase tripartite dialogue on important issues like Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) or Workforce Development Agreements (WDAs).

Unifor whole heartedly supports the creation of such a tripartite entity to increase social dialogue between the stakeholders and commends Senator Bellemare once again in the tabling of Bill S-244.

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