Unifor’s submission to
Ontario’s 2023 Budget Consultation

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# About Unifor

Unifor is Canada’s largest union in the private sector representing 315,000 members, 160,000 of whom live and work in Ontario. Unifor members work in health care, long-term care, the auto sector, public transit vehicle manufacturing, transportation, energy, gaming, hospitality and more. Unifor is pleased to provide input into Ontario’s 2023 provincial budget and recommends that government immediately implement the items below.

# Public Services

Unifor is growing increasingly alarmed by the current government’s actions towards Ontario’s public services. The continued starvation of public services, even in the face of windfall tax revenue, is incredibly disappointing and short sighted. Unifor recommends that government reverse their actions and instead reinvigorate Ontario’s public services to build a strong foundation for workers and families today and in the future.

## Child Care

* Ensure that the expansion of publicly funded, $10 a days child care focuses on not-for-profit spaces; and
* Establish an effective workforce strategy for the child care sector that includes:
	+ Salary scale starting at $25 per hour for all child care workers and $30 per hour for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs);
	+ Benefits and pensions;
	+ Paid sick days;
	+ Professional development time;
	+ Paid programming time.

## Health Care and Long-Term Care

* Reverse the recent decision to open up more surgeries to private clinics, including future plans to expand this beyond cataracts;
* Institute additional health care measures to address compensation and staffing levels such as:
	+ Repeal Bill 124;
	+ create a plan with an accountable timeline to reach wage parity across hospitals, long-term care and home care; and
	+ require a ratio of at least 70% full-time staff in hospitals and long-term care.
* Phase out for-profit long-term care homes and transition toward community-based, publicly-owned or non-profit homes; and
* Make sure the 4 hour standard of care is mandatory at each long-term care facility and hold homes accountable for meeting the standard.

## Pharmacare

* Enter negotiations with the Federal Government to implement a publicly funded Provincial pharmacare program providing all Ontarians access to free prescription medications.

## Public Transit

* Ensure adequate and permanent provincial funding to maintain and expand high quality, affordable public transit service and infrastructure; prohibit the use of public funds to reduce and eliminate municipal transit routes while replacing them with private micro-transit (e.g. Uber, Lyft) services; and
* Ensure that public transit vehicle procurement requires the maximum amount of Canadian Content possible to sustain and create good jobs across the province.

# Support for Workers

* Continue the work of raising the minimum wage and ensure essential service workers are paid according to the value they bring to society:
	+ Raise the minimum wage to 60% of the median wage for full-time workers. Based on this benchmark, Ontario’s 2022 minimum wage would be $18; and
	+ Provide additional funding to increase the wages of low-wage workers in the broader public sector including child care workers, social service workers, health care workers, and education sector workers.
* Introduce 10 permanent paid sick days with additional days provided to workers, as required for isolation or quarantine periods during a public health crisis. Paid-sick days must be universally accessible, flexible, employer paid and not require a doctor’s note;
* Hire more workplace health and safety inspectors to ensure health and safety laws and regulations are being followed and workplaces are safe; and
* Introduce legislation that enables card-based union certification.

# Invest in Labour Adjustment Programs

* Ensure adequate and permanent provincial funding to maintain and expand adjustment advisory program (AAP) agreements across the province when workers are faced with a workplace closure;
* Continue to set-up action centres and labour adjustment committees through AAP partnerships with unions to ensure a holistic, peer-to-peer focused, collaborative approach to labour adjustment; and
* Utilize AAP agreements and partnerships to create a dedicated auto industry labour market adjustment program for autoworkers affected by job displacement resulting from a shift to ZEV or other significant technological changes.

# Auto Strategy and Electric Vehicles

* Collaborate with federal and municipal governments in a comprehensive and targeted auto development strategy that implements Unifor’s 29 recommendations in its policy program “Navigating the Road Ahead” and facilitates investments in zero emission vehicle (ZEV) assembly programs, battery cell production and other critical component parts alongside internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicle and powertrain programs;
* Continue investing in EV infrastructure, including charging stations (that support the benchmark target of 1 charger for every 10 on-road electric vehicles) as well as the expansion of clean and renewable sources of energy to bolster the provincial power system;
* Re-establish consumer purchasing incentives for ZEVs, coordinated with the forthcoming introduction of Canadian-made all-electric passenger vehicles;
* Provide targeted support to identified at-risk auto parts suppliers, enabling them to retool operations, and retrain workers to participate in the growing ZEV supply chain; and
* Coordinate, with the federal government, the delivery of a constellation of job transition supports for autoworkers affected by job displacement resulting from a shift to ZEVs. These supports would include tailored income maintenance, labour market readiness and skills upgrading (including through AAP agreements), relocation assistance, early retirement bridging, and other supports necessary to successful labour market adjustment.

# Ease the School Bus Driver Shortage

* Provide additional permanent government funding to support school bus driver hiring and retention, increase the number of buses and routes, and increase resources such as paid adult school bus monitors to assist drivers that transport younger children or students with extra needs.

# Improve WSIB

* Repeal the change to WSIB that allows the Board to return premiums to employers. Government must undertake meaningful consultation with all stakeholders on the entire workers compensation system, including benefit coverage levels and how claims are processed. Recommendations for improving the system include:
	+ Increase the loss of earnings benefit to 90% and restore the 5% reduction;
	+ Match the inflation rate applied to injured workers’ Loss of Earnings to the rate of increase of the CPI;
	+ Restore the loss of retirement income benefit ratio to 105% contribution; and
	+ Provide greater coverage for mental stress injuries and occupational diseases.
* Provide additional payments to families of workers who have suffered a workplace fatality;
* Provide funding to reopen access to the office of the worker advisor to unionized workers so that all injured workers can access support without discrimination; and
* Make retirement homes a Schedule 1 employer for the purpose of WSIB so retirement home workers are covered in the event of injury.

# Anti-Racism

* Provide increased funding towards the development of community-based programs and initiatives to combat racism and Islamophobia in the province, as well providing additional resources to support the work of Ontario’s Anti-Racism Directorate, as they look to implement a renewed Anti-Racism Strategic Plan; and
* Establish and resource a provincial Task Force, comprised of key political, labour, academic and community stakeholders, to develop and implement a plan to curb increasing rates of hate crimes against Black, Indigenous and people of colour in Ontario, including crimes stemming from Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

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