

March 12, 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL

The Right Honourable Prime Minister Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
pm@pm.gc.ca

The Honourable Minister Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Health
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The Honourable Minister Filomena Tassi, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Labour
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The Honourable Minister Carla Qualtrough, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion
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Dear Prime Minister, Ministers,

The COVID-19 crisis continues to unfold, and conditions on the ground are changing by the minute. Unfortunately, based on the experience of other countries where the pandemic appears to have spread sooner, we can safely assume that conditions here in Canada will continue to worsen. At the same time, we have the advantage of learning from how other countries have responded as we develop our own emergency measures. It is clear that we cannot afford to take a “wait and see” position: if we are to effectively confront and contain the spread of COVID-19, and avoid the economic disaster the pandemic could conceivably trigger, the time to act is now.

On March 5, 2020, I wrote to Ministers Tassi and Qualtrough, encouraging their respective Ministries to act quickly, decisively and collaboratively with provinces on various supports for workers, including enhanced and extended benefits coverage and other financial supports. Just yesterday, Prime Minister Trudeau announced an initial \$1 billion response package to address the COVID-19 crisis, which included waiving the one-week waiting period for Employment Insurance. In addition, provincial governments have begun to put together their own

responses, including Ontario's \$100 million response package, also announced yesterday. We are encouraged by these quick responses, but more needs to be done.

We understand the need to move quickly and provide financial support and other resources for a comprehensive public health response to this crisis. At the same time, we respectfully call on the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to move with equal urgency in developing a comprehensive response package to support affected workers across Canada. The March 11th announcement regarding waiving the one-week waiting period for Employment Insurance is a good first step, but there are many more measures governments at all levels can – and must – take to avoid the worst possible outcomes for working people in Canada. Despite the elimination of the waiting period, many workers will not meet the requirements to qualify for the accelerated EI support, due to the unfortunate rise of precarious and irregular work in our labour market.

We would like to re-iterate our March 5th call for a more comprehensive employment support package to help workers weather the COVID-19 storm. In particular, we respectfully urge governments to implement immediately the following measures:

- Institute 14 days of paid sick leave whether a worker has been formally quarantined by a health official, or been asked to self-isolate (this is the minimum any government should do during a pandemic);
- Regarding the waiver of the one-week waiting period for Employment Insurance, reduce the number of qualifying hours to 360 (from 600);
- Increase the duration of EI sick leave from 15 to 26 weeks;
- Waive the EI sickness benefit requirement for a medical certificate;
- Implement emergency special coverage unemployment insurance payments for vulnerable workers (including precarious workers, and independent contractors), who otherwise would not receive EI benefits;
- Introduce special “income relief” measures for full-time and part-time workers in the health care sector (as was done during the SARS outbreak), who are more susceptible to contracting COVID-19;
- Reduce the number of qualifying hours for regular Employment Insurance benefits to 360 (from what now falls between 420 and 700 hours), to ensure more workers – especially vulnerable workers in the hospitality, tourism and retail sectors – can access benefits in the event of job displacement (an assessment of this measure should follow, with consideration of making this change permanent);
- Ease federal Work-Sharing rules, to maximize eligibility, and enhance benefits to mitigate job losses especially within vulnerable sectors (like tourism);
- Establish clear job security provisions to make sure that quarantined workers retain their jobs, hours of work, and other working conditions when they return to work;
- Waive requirements for employees to produce doctor's notes in cases of illness (at the very least, consider other less onerous ways to substantiate absences due to illness).

There is growing expert consensus that, along with diligent personal hygiene habits including hand-washing and avoiding face-touching, social isolation is a critical component of an effective public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, without the adequate response measures in place, too many workers will face a difficult choice between going to work while sick and making ends meet. This is simply unacceptable, both for the well-being of the affected employees and for the health of the broader public. Workers must have the ability to stay home sick without suffering financial hardship, and governments must implement appropriate policies to make that happen, as a public health goal and as an economic support measure.

No Canadian worker will be left unaffected by the COVID-19 crisis. Whether they are members of a union or not, whether they are hotel housekeepers, personal support workers providing elder care, airline ticketing agents, or manufacturing workers integrated in a global supply chain, there is no question that workers in Canada will suffer the economic effects of the pandemic. In times of crisis, we naturally look to our governments for leadership. As the federal, provincial, and territorial governments roll out your public health response to the COVID-19 crisis, we respectfully ask you to move with equal urgency to provide vital employment and income supports.

We appreciate the measures undertaken so far by the federal, provincial and territorial governments, and would be glad to provide further information and support for these measures, as required.

Sincerely,



Jerry Dias
National President

cc. The Honourable Minister Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P., The Honourable John Horgan, M.L.A., The Honourable Jason Kenney, M.L.A., The Honourable Scott Moe, M.L.A., The Honourable Brian Pallister, M.L.A., The Honourable Doug Ford, M.P.P., The Honourable Francois Legault, M.N.A., The Honourable Blaine Higgs, M.L.A., The Honourable Dennis King, M.L.A., The Honourable Stephen McNeil, M.L.A., The Honourable Dwight Ball, M.H.A., The Honourable Sandy Silver, M.L.A., The Honourable Caroline Cochrane, M.L.A., The Honourable Joe Savikataaq, M.L.A., Lana Payne, Angelo DiCaro, Scott Doherty.

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