National Office
205 Placer Court
Toronto, Ontario M2H 3H9

UNIFOR
theUnion | lesyndicat

Bureau national
205 Placer Court
Toronto (Ontario) M2H 3H9

Jerry Dias
National President
Président national

Renaud Gagné
Quebec Director
Directeur québécois

Lana Payne
National Secretary-Treasurer
Secrétaire-trésorière nationale

April 3, 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL

The Honourable Minister Carla Qualtrough, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion
Carla.Qualtrough@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister,

Re: Considerations for forthcoming emergency benefits

Our union is closely following developments with respect to proposed new income assistance measures, including the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) as well as the Employment Insurance Emergency Response Benefit. Our staff have been engaged in many discussions with federal officials on these matters, in recent weeks.

There are a myriad of challenges in establishing new systems and procedures to address the record number of Employment Insurance claims over the past weeks, resulting from the COVID-19 virus. I commend you and your staff for attempting to construct an income assistance program for unemployed workers that goes beyond the confines of our Employment Insurance system – and its rigid, outdated eligibility rules – to cover a broader scope of affected workers. The speed at which your team is working is extraordinary and I appreciate your hard work.

I understand that officials have yet to finalize many key program details. However, each day there is greater clarity on how this program will look, including certain areas of concern. It is critical that federal officials identify and address as many major problem areas as possible prior to the rollout of these benefits.

I am bringing to your attention a number of potential problem areas in these new programs that have been identified by our union. We are seeking your assurances that:

- Seasonal workers, particularly fisheries workers, who expected to return to employment but now cannot, are either eligible for new CERB assistance or have expiring EI claims extended for an indefinite period;

- Unemployed workers, receiving the EI Emergency Response Benefit are eligible for Service Canada approved Supplementary Unemployment Benefit plans;

- After the 16-week emergency benefit period, EI-eligible workers can transition into a full claim for Regular Benefits, without penalty and with no waiting period;

- Despite establishing special EI benefits related to COVID-19, all otherwise eligible claims will continue to be processed, including 'working while on claim' provisions for workers with reduced work hours;

- Unemployed workers, entitled to a benefit rate in excess of $500 per week, will receive a compensatory adjustment to their claim that is proportionate to their lost earnings;

- Workers who quit their jobs for 'just cause' are eligible to receive CERB payments;

- Workers providing care to individuals who are vulnerable or immunocompromised, and have not contracted COVID-19, are eligible to receive CERB payments;

- Workers whose income has been greatly reduced but not eliminated, are eligible for CERB or EI Emergency Response Benefits; and

- Workers, such as students, newcomers, and those facing injury or disability, who are unable to meet the $5,000 income threshold, will be able to access the CERB and EI Emergency Response Benefit.

Minister, I urge you and your staff to consider and address each of these matters, in the course of finalizing program details. It is imperative your government responds to these challenges, given the effect they will have on hundreds of thousands of workers.

Our union is standing by to assist in whatever way we can.

Please do not hesitate to contact my office directly at jerry.dias@unifor.org

Sincerely,

Jerry Dias
National President

cc. The Honourable Minister Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., F.R.S.C., The Honourable Minister Filomena Tassi, P.C., M.P., Mr. Daniel Blaikie, M.P., Mr. Dan Albas, M.P., Ms. Louise Chalbot, M.P., Mr. Pierre Laliberté, Ms. Judith Andrew, Lana Payne, Scott Doherty, Angelo DiCaro.

JD/klcope343