



May 8, 2020

Caring for a Living

The Community Social Services Bargaining Association of Unions collectively represents more than 15,000 community-based social service workers in British Columbia.

Via Email: FIN.Minister@gov.bc.ca

The Honourable Carole James
Minister of Finance

Dear Minister James:

BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)

Canadian Union of Public Employees' (CUPE)

Hospital Employees' Union (HEU)

Health Sciences Association of BC (HSABC)

Construction and Specialized Workers' Union Local 1611 (CSWU)

United Food and Commercial Workers' Union Local 1518 (UFCW)

United Steelworkers of America (USW)

Service Employee's International Union (SEIU)

BC Nurses' Union (BCNU)

Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC)

RE: Fair Pay and Safe Working Conditions for Community Social Service Workers

I am writing this letter to you in my capacity as the spokesperson for the Community Social Services Bargaining Association (CSSBA). The CSSBA is an association of independent unions that collectively represent approximately 16,000 workers in the community social services sector in the province and includes the BC Government and Service Employees' Union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Hospital Employees' Union, the Health Sciences Association, the Construction and Specialized Workers' Union, the Christian Labour Association of Canada, the United Steelworkers, the United Food and Commercial Workers' Union, and the BC Nurses' Union.

All workers in the CSS sector have been deemed essential service workers under the Emergency Program Act. The CSSBA is concerned about the inequities in pay and working conditions between community social service workers and workers in the health sector performing the same or similar duties, in the same or similar working conditions. These concerns are heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic when the vast majority of our members continue to provide services to clients in their workplaces and in their clients' homes.

Every day in communities and neighbourhoods across B.C. our members provide vital services to some of our province's most vulnerable citizens including children, people with developmental disabilities, immigrants and refugees, women and children experiencing violence, adults and youth in conflict with the law, and Indigenous individuals and families on and off reserve. Often this work involves providing services to clients that do not and cannot understand the necessity of social or physical distancing and may also involve direct care to clients such as toileting, feeding, bathing, administering medication, and other personal care. Work such as this, where physical distancing is impossible and where personal care often necessitates intimate contact with clients, is very similar in nature to much of the work performed in the health sector in acute care, long term care, or community health settings.

The constituent unions of the CSSBA have learned through a deluge of comments, concerns and complaints from our community social services membership that they are feeling inordinate pressure to attend at work and to provide care and support for their clients, with little or no recognition for the risks they assume in doing so. The acknowledged lack of personal protective equipment for our workers in this sector may place them at additional risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus in the course of their duties. These disparities are particularly challenging when workers in the health sector are receiving appropriate personal protective equipment and, in some sectors, workers are receiving wage supplements for performing their duties in the unique circumstances of this pandemic.

Many workers performing front line work in the grocery, banking, food, and retail sector, as well as some non-government funded childcare and community social services agencies, are receiving additional pay in light of the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ontario has introduced a "pandemic payment" to workers of an additional \$4 per hour over the next 16 weeks, plus a possible \$250 bonus. These payments will be made to CSS workers in workplaces identical to those in which our members work, including homes supporting people with developmental disabilities, shelters for survivors of gender-based violence and human trafficking, youth justice residential facilities, licensed children's residential sites, directly operated residential facilities, emergency shelters, supportive housing facilities, respite/drop-in centres, and temporary and overflow shelter facilities. The eligible workers in these worksites include direct support workers, clinical staff, housekeeping staff, security staff, administration personnel, maintenance staff, food service workers and nurses. These are the very same workers as those in the CSS sector in British Columbia that are delivering front line services to the most vulnerable people in the province.

Likewise, in British Columbia, the Health Sciences Professionals Bargaining Association (HSPBA) has just negotiated a \$5 million "pandemic fund" to top up their workers' wages for the month of April. We understand that any HSPBA member working in a direct care environment where they cannot socially distance for 100% of their shift, will be eligible for a \$4 per hour top up. As described above, CSS workers are regularly working with clients where social distancing is impossible. Similarly, BC Housing announced a "Safe Staffing Strategy" on April 30th that provides qualifying front-line workers with up to \$5 per hour as a temporary adjustment to pay, retroactive to April 1 and ongoing to May 30.

We encourage you to provide the same consideration to CSS workers working on the front line providing direct care to their clients as we have seen in other sectors in BC, in the CSS sector in Ontario, and for HSPBA members here at home.

Further, we ask that you consider additional benefits for our members in these extraordinary times, such as:

- Providing sick pay at 100% of wages, given the added concerns during this pandemic and the expectation from the Public Health Officer that workers stay home when they are unwell, even if it is not COVID-19 related



- Providing meal allowances to workers who cannot leave their worksites
- Providing a clothing allowance or laundry allowance in appreciation of additional washing that must occur or where employers are demanding work related footwear and clothing
- Providing a general allowance with allows for workers to address additional costs arising from working during the pandemic

Our expectation is simple. CSS workers should receive the same treatment as other workers in other sectors with the provision of comparable pay and benefits to address the unique demands and challenges of working during this pandemic.

Yours truly,

Andrea L. Davis
Spokesperson, CSSBA

AD/dw
move**up**
FA-698

cc: *The Honourable Shane Simpson, Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction*
The Honourable Katrine Conroy, Minister of Children and Family Development
The Honourable Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General
The Honourable Scott Fraser, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
The Honourable Robert Fleming, Minister of Education
The Honourable Melanie Mark, Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training
The Honourable Michelle Mungall, Minister of Jobs, Trade, and Technology
The Honourable Adrian Dix, Minister of Health
CSSBA Constituent Unions