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Releases

Mandatory paid sick leave a milestone for public health, equity, and safe workplaces, but five days inadequate

(Unceded Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam territories — Vancouver, BC) Today's paid sick leave announcement by the BC government represents a significant milestone — but still falls short of providing the coverage sick workers need, BCFED President Laird Cronk said today.

"This is an important achievement for public health and safer workplaces," Cronk said. "But we're disappointed that it's only half the 10-day standard that science supports and that is the overwhelming preference of British Columbians."

All workers covered by BC's Employment Standards Act will be entitled to employer-paid sick leave starting January 1, 2022. The change means immediate help to the more than half of BC workers who have no paid sick leave, and nearly 90 per cent of disproportionately racialized and women workers in low-wage sectors.

"Make no mistake, paid sick leave will save lives here in BC. It's going to reduce the spread of disease and ensure healthier workplaces, while cutting healthcare costs and driving down inequality," Cronk said.

The five-day program, however, falls well short of what workers, public health experts and economists have called for — and what is the standard in most of the OECD, Cronk said. And it’s only half of the Canadian government’s 10-day paid sick leave commitment for workers in federally-regulated sectors.

“While we’re disappointed, we’ll continue to fight for the full 10 days of leave. The public health and economic case is clear. Despite some business lobbyists’ dire claims about costs to employers, study after study—and practical experience around the world— show the opposite: paid sick leave is good for the economy,” Cronk said.

“Workers need to have the confidence that if they get sick more than once a year, they have the protection they need to make the choice to stay home. ”

While supporting the seamless employer-paid model, Cronk said the BCFED remains opposed to the 90-day waiting period for eligibility that will exclude many seasonal, construction, farm, and other precarious workers from coverage. "How does it make sense that a worker is forced to go to work sick if they are ill during the first three months on the job? We’re also concerned that workers in the gig economy, who are too often misclassified by their employer as contractors, will continue to be left out.”

The BCFED is also challenging the requirement for doctors’ notes which physicians in other provinces have rejected as imposing costly, needless strain on the health care system.

The BCFED led a broad coalition of community organizations, employers, and unions in a public campaign for 10 days of paid sick leave. That campaign will now continue in BC, as advocates around the country mobilize to make 10 days the minimum standard for every worker in Canada.

“It never made sense to go to work sick, something the pandemic made clear, and now is our opportunity to truly fill that gap for all workers.”