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Releases

BC Federation of Labour welcomes changes to workers' compensation as a positive first step

(Coast Salish Territory, Vancouver, BC) Today, the BC NDP government announced changes to the *Workers Compensation Act* arising from three expert reviews conducted in 2018 and 2019 by Lisa Jean Helps, Paul Petrie and Terry Bogyo. The Helps report responded to the two tragic mill explosions in Northern BC. Petrie's report examined WCB compensation policy, and Bogyo made recommendations on the allocation of the Workers' Compensation Board's (WCB's) surplus. A fourth review conducted by Janet Patterson explores comprehensive changes to the compensation system and the *Workers Compensation Act* and has yet to be released.

"The BC Federation of Labour welcomes these changes as a positive first step towards a renewed worker-centred approach to health and safety and supporting injured workers," said Laird Cronk, president of the BC Federation of Labour. "Worker health and safety and compensation are top priorities for us, and these improvements are long-overdue."

The changes will improve access to treatment and compensation for many workers. The legislation will remove the one-year restriction on filing mental health claims. Changes will ensure both loss of earnings and functional impairment will be considered in calculating benefits and make sure that workers always receive the higher of the two. Amendments address workplace safety by removing barriers to investigations, giving more power to investigators, and by allowing courts to hear victim

impact statements. Finally, the changes improve access to justice by allowing the Workers' Compensation Appeal Tribunal to hear cases related to the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Human Rights Code*, making it harder for employers to avoid paying premiums, and relaxing the 75-day rule which limited the ability of WCB to change a decision.

"These changes and more are needed to ensure that our workers' compensation system takes care of injured workers and their families," said Cronk. "We will be continuing to advocate for further changes to restore lost benefits and make the system more accessible and fair for workers."

Additionally, the legislation enables the fast-tracking of presumptive coverage for occupational diseases caused by viral pathogens. "The BCFED is urging the WCB to move ahead on presumptive coverage for workers who contract or become ill with COVID-19 at work. We support removing the 90-day waiting period so the WCB can quickly implement this coverage," stated Cronk.