July 9, 2020 |

Releases

“Working sick isn’t working”: BCFED launches plan to ensure paid sick leave for every worker

(Unceded Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam territories — Vancouver, BC) — With workplace COVID-19 outbreaks fresh in the minds of political leaders and the public alike, the BCFED has released a plan to ensure paid sick leave for every worker in British Columbia.

“No worker should have to choose between staying home when they’re sick and paying the bills. And with our plan, no worker will have to,” said BCFED secretary-treasurer Sussanne Skidmore. More than 75% of British Columbians supported permanent paid sick leave for all BC workers, with employers and government sharing the cost during the pandemic, according to a May 2020 poll by Stratcom.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, several outbreaks in workplaces such as long-term care facilities and poultry and meat processing plants within and outside BC have been traced to workers who felt they had no choice but to come to work even though they were feeling sick.

“Paid sick leave is good for public health, for the economy and for workers,” Skidmore said. “It keeps workplace outbreaks from happening, and businesses from having to shut down. But over half of BC workers aged 25 to 65 have no paid sick leave at all.”

The BCFED proposal calls for a minimum of three days of paid sick leave per year for every worker — full-time, part-time, permanent, temporary and casual, regardless if they are in a union or not. Workers get more sick leave based on the hours they work, up to a maximum of 10 total days of paid sick leave every year. An employee on sick leave would receive their full wages or salary, paid by the employer.

Because of the financial impact of the pandemic on many businesses, the BCFED plan has the federal and provincial governments subsidizing up to 75 percent of the sick leave pay for new and struggling employers during the pandemic. Subsidy levels are directly tied to the pandemic's impact on the business.

The plan also calls for 10 days of paid leave specifically earmarked for COVID-19, covering workers who contract the disease, who have to self-isolate, or who need to care for a loved one who has the virus. (Workers who contract COVID-19 at work are already eligible to make a WCB claim.)

The BCFED plan also allows for an additional 16 weeks of unpaid sick leave once an employee has used up their paid leave, during which their job will be protected and their employer can't fire them.

"Before the outbreak, BC employment law had the worst sick leave provisions in Canada: no paid sick leave and zero job protection," said Skidmore. "And if we look south of the border, 76 per cent of American workers have some form of paid sick leave, while less than half of BC workers do. So we have some catching up to do."

The BCFED launched a campaign website to promote the paid sick leave plan at , inviting British Columbians to sign an open letter to key Ministers in the BC government.

"It's time for BC workers to have job-protected paid sick leave. We can't afford to wait for another outbreak," said Skidmore. Paid sick leave is crucial public health policy that is needed to fight future waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, she added.

"When sick workers can stay home, their illness is less severe and they get better more quickly. They don't pass it on to coworkers, so fewer of them get sick. In a pandemic, preventing a workplace

outbreak may be crucial to a business’s survival. Working sick doesn’t work for businesses, either.”

Both the BC provincial and federal governments have publicly committed to implementing paid sick leave, but efforts to bring other provinces on board are stalled.

“This is much too urgent and important to wait for every province to sign on," Skidmore said. “We need a made-in-BC paid sick leave now, so workers aren’t forced to choose between their health and livelihood.”

Editor's note: This post was updated with a link to a newer version of the BCFED's campaign for 10 days of paid sick leave in BC.