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Releases

BC labour movement welcomes sick leave protections, advocates for robust social supports

(Coast Salish territory, Vancouver BC) - The provincial response to the COVID-19 crisis includes important supports and protections for workers advocated by the BC Federation of Labour (BCFED).

Yesterday, the BC government legislated unlimited protected leave for workers who are quarantined, self-isolating, or caring for loved ones amidst the pandemic. BC also announced income supports—a $1,000 tax-free Emergency Benefit for Workers, and an increase to the Climate Action Tax Credit—that will help supplement a patchwork of federal programs.

“Protected sick leave throughout this health crisis will allow every worker to follow public health advice as we collectively flatten the curve,” said BCFED President Laird Cronk. “We are encouraged BC put forward this package as an important first step, recognizing supports needed for workers will surely evolve.” As part of its response, the BC government legislated three days of unpaid protected sick leave that will persist beyond the current health crisis.

The BCFED continues to call for proactive guidance from government and WorkSafeBC towards employers on their duties and obligations to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission and keep workplaces safe. This includes highlighting the right of workers to refuse unsafe work, developing exposure control plans, increasing WCB safety inspections, and allowing workers to work from home

as much as possible. Employment Standards Branch enforcement is also critical at this time.

Government financial supports need to be timely and must reach those most in need. The BCFED continues to call on government to prevent evictions and mortgage foreclosures in BC due to COVID-19. Further, the $1.7 billion earmarked for critical services and supports should flow immediately, particularly to help those with barriers to housing and health services, and to strengthen social and disability assistance programs.

COVID-19 has highlighted glaring gaps in both federal and provincial safety nets. “The pandemic has demonstrated the need for robust worker rights and broad protections in a changing economy,” added Cronk. “More poignantly, it has revealed how undervalued certain critical work has been in our society. The myth that lower-wage workers—whether in grocery stores, food delivery, or the care sector— performed work of less value, has now been exposed.”