March 16, 2020 |

Releases

Unions issue urgent call for paid and protected sick leave for all workers in BC

(Coast Salish territory; Vancouver, BC): As the COVID-19 pandemic disrupts and shuts down BC's economy, the labour movement is calling on the provincial and federal governments to move urgently to guarantee paid, protected sick leave and other income supports for all workers.

The BCFED is outlining five concrete actions needed immediately to ensure workers can follow public health advice and have the necessary supports to meet their needs, as the economic pressures on workers increase.

"Paid sick leave, and other income supports to workers, will help slow the spread of infection," said Laird Cronk, President of the BCFED. "The pandemic can exacerbate existing inequities. But it doesn't need to. Our collective response needs to take the untenable choice of working sick to pay the bills off the table for any worker."

To support workers, the BCFED is specifically calling for:

1. Legislated changes to the Employment Standards Act to secure immediate and retroactive job protection for workers who take sick leave, including workers that self-isolate, or are quarantined;

2. Provision of paid sick leave for all workers, including part-time and casual workers, temporary foreign workers and migrant workers, throughout the duration of isolation or quarantine;
3. Access to income supports/transfers for workers that fall outside of current definitions of employees, including independent contractors and the self-employed;
4. Immediate waiving of any requirement for doctor's notes for any worker;
5. Enhancement of Employment Insurance (EI) benefits during the crisis to at least 75% of insurable income, reduction of barriers to access EI, and allocation of extra support staff at Service Canada to help smoothly administer the access to EI.

The BC Federation of Labour (BCFED) called for initial measures to support workers on March 9th. COVID-19 has brought to light serious gaps in the adequacy of sick leave benefits in BC and highlights the need for substantial reforms when the health crisis is behind us.

The BCFED continues to call for proactive guidance from government to employers on their duties and obligations to perform risk assessments and keep workplaces safe. This includes highlighting the right of workers to refuse unsafe work, the need for exposure control plans, and allowing workers to work from home as much as possible.

"Without bold investments to support workers, the economic impacts of this situation could be far-reaching and damaging," added Cronk. "Investments in workers' economic security will be pennies on the dollar for government should this pandemic lead to a sharp economic downturn."

Media contact:

Jonathan Sas | Communications Director

604-861-4321 | media@bcfed.ca

Further resources:

The BCFED supports the advocacy of other labour and progressive organizations for further health and safety, social and economic policy measures during this crisis. Below is a list of key resources:

• BCGEU Calls for Suspension of Rent and Mortgage Payments for Sick/Self-Isolating Workers

• Migrant Rights Network Calls for Secure Healthcare and Labour Protections for Migrant Workers

- Canadian Labour Congress Urges Sweeping Supports for Workers
- Health Sciences Association- Information for Health Care Workers
- Health Employees Union Updates on COVID-19
- Know Your Rights at Work - UFCW 1518 COVID-19 Update