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Releases

Protection for workers must be key pillar of COVID-19 response

(Coast Salish territory; Vancouver, BC) The BC Federation of Labour (BCFED) is calling on provincial and federal governments to act now to ensure workers can adhere to public health advice around the coronavirus, without lost pay or the fear of losing their jobs. While BC's response to the virus has been hailed for its thoroughness from a public health perspective, the recommended 14-day self-isolation has brought to light serious concerns for workers and their families.

"Workers should not have to choose between their health and their ability to keep their jobs and pay their bills," said Laird Cronk, President of the BC Federation of Labour. "Ensuring paid and protected sick leave during a pandemic is an immediate and practical step governments can take to protect public health, limit the spread of infection, and remove an untenable choice for workers."

Paid sick leave is not currently covered by the Employment Standards Act in BC, leaving many workers— including part-time and casual workers—in a precarious situation. All workers, including independent contractors and the self-employed, are facing economic pressures, not only in situations of illness or self isolation, but also with reduced work shifts, business closures and layoffs due to the impacts of the virus.

Due to the extraordinary circumstances, the BCFED is urging government to be proactive and issue guidance 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 and considering waiving the need for a doctor' notes to access leave to help limit the spread of infection.

The BCFED is also calling on the federal government to waive the one week waiting period for access to Employment Insurance for those who have lost their jobs due to the illness, and to consider other income support options depending on the scale of the spread of the virus.

"Paid and protected sick leave is not some luxury benefit. It's an essential public health priority" added Cronk. "Let's make sure our response to this virus doesn't exacerbate economic insecurity"

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