



March 19th, 2020

Honourable Dwight Ball, Premier
Government of Newfoundland & Labrador
Confederation Building, 8th Floor - East Block
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL
A1B 4J6

Dear Premier,

Thank you, and your government, for the steps you have taken to date to help keep us all stay safe; and to ensure that if and when this crisis escalates, that our province will be as prepared as possible and our citizens will be supported and protected.

I have asked that labour be included in your discussions around next steps to help protect workers during this time. Public workers have been on the front lines, performing the essential services that we all need – especially now - keeping our population safe and healthy, and preparing for an acceleration of the virus. Vulnerable workers are also at the front lines – in grocery stores, hospitals, banks, food production, pharmacies, gas stations, etc., making sure we all have access to other critical needs. Not all these workers have a union, and many of them are not able to work from home.

Please listen to, and act on the requests of the joint letter by the public sector unions, and ensure that labour (public sector unions and the NLFL) and community are included in the planning and implementation of the COVID-19 response, to ensure that no-one is left behind.

In light of this, and as president of an organization representing 70,000 unionized members and advocating for all workers in the Province, I am asking that you consider the following as you address the concerns of your Constituents through legislative, regulatory and policy changes in the upcoming days, as well as strong messages to employers and workers as we all work together.

It's important to note that this is first and foremost a health crisis. But we are also aware that we are heading towards an economic crisis as well. Many workers and businesses are very concerned about their ability to ride out this crisis.

All the more reason to take example from the Federal government, and ensure that all voices are heard at the table. The only way out of this crisis is through solidarity and support for each other.



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Workers in this province need their government to assure them that they will be protected. While federal measures are welcome, and will be very helpful, there are things that the

Newfoundland & Labrador (NL) government can do to address gaps. Your message that workers will be protected and supported through this has been very important.

Workers need to be able to take time off work – either to self-isolate, or to deal with child care issues, sick parents or family members. They need to be protected against job loss for this, and if sick – they need to have paid sick time. We are asking that the Labour Standards Act be amended to include seven (7) paid sick days, as well as an additional fourteen (14) paid sick days in the event of a crisis like COVID-19.

Eliminate sick note requirements for ALL workers.

Also, we want government to ensure workers who are forced to stay off work for issues related to COVID-19 and government directives, do not lose their jobs.

Health Benefit coverage should be maintained for workers who are laid off because of closures, reduced hours etc. Workers who don't have health benefits should also be covered if they get sick. For example, not all workers in hospitals, doctor's offices and care facilities may be covered by a private health plan.

Ensure full workers' compensation to any worker who interacts with the public and who contracts health conditions related to COVID-19.

Ensure the health and safety of all workers – particularly frontline workers that cannot work from home, by providing the necessary equipment and supplies to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Instruct all provincially-regulated institutions to extend and relax payment requirements on financial responsibilities facing consumers and households; including utility, rent and mortgage payments.

Also, we have heard from many workers that companies are not all making the appropriate accommodations to ensure worker protection in the workplace, especially where there are customers, clients, guests, etc. Messages need to be clear – employers have a legal obligation to take the necessary means to keep their workplaces and workers safe and healthy. They should be penalized anytime they violate their obligation. Your message to them should be as strong as possible to enforce this obligation.



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Thank you for your continued work on this enormous challenge for all of us. I look forward to your response and to working with you in the days and weeks ahead, to ensure no one gets left behind.

Sincerely,

Mary Shortall
President, Newfoundland & Labrador Federation of Labour

*JR/MS
Unifor 597*