



**Media Release**  
**For Immediate Release**  
**March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**Inadequate Worker Protection Systems for COVID-19 –  
Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour (NLFL)**

**St. John's, NL:** The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour (NLFL) is asking the provincial government to immediately enact all the necessary legislative and policy changes to protect workers who will be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in Newfoundland & Labrador (NL). While self-isolation is important, and workers' wages absolutely should be covered with or without paid sick leave provisions, many other workers will also feel the pain of lost income through closures and layoffs, and reduced hours.

NLFL President Mary Shortall, is asking the provincial government to take immediate measures by amending the Labour Standards Act, to embed paid sick leave provisions in law for the long term, so that workers in NL can afford to do the right thing, and to ensure we are properly prepared for the next health emergency whenever it comes.

"The absence of legislated paid sick days not only jeopardizes the health of low waged and other workers with no paid sick leave, but also jeopardizes public safety," says Shortall.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that "paid sick leave plays a crucial role, especially in times of crisis where many workers fear dismissal and discrimination when reporting sick." They also found that "gaps in paid sick leave, results in severe impacts on public health."

The NLFL is also asking government to remove the provision for sick notes from the Labour Standards Act, stating that the province does not need sick people, during this pandemic, in doctors' offices and emergency rooms.

The NLFL believes that employers must also understand that there will be legitimate absenteeism issues with closures and cancellations, and that it will become increasingly important for employers to have reasonable responses to these issues.

Shortall adds that, "the consequences of COVID-19 are not limited to sickness and self-isolation. Many workers (and more each day) are suffering the consequences of interruptions in earnings, such as layoffs and reduced hours."



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Changes announced by the federal government, while helpful for some, are not available to all workers, and especially those who are not EI eligible.

Shortall says, “they are urging the provincial government to support the NLFL’s request for an emergency fund that provides a non-repayable living allowance for those who suffer job loss or an interruption of earnings, as a direct or indirect consequence of COVID-19. Such a fund could be administered through the Federal government, via the EI program, but come from general revenues.”

“Permanent EI changes, like reduced qualifying hours (360), higher benefit rates and longer duration, especially for EI sick provisions, would also be welcome at this time,” says Shortall.

“We all have a part to play in limiting the spread of COVID-19 exposure”. Workers and consumption fuel our economy, and I believe governments have an obligation to insure that all workers are protected during the pandemic; and to urge employers to enact measures that keep their employees safe, informed and supported.”

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