

November 21, 2021

The Honourable Harry Bains
Minister of Labour
Government of British Columbia
PO Box 9064 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 0E2

Submitted Via Email: LBR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Bains,

The Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce is the largest business association serving Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, Anmore, and Belcarra. We represent 800+ businesses from every sector, most of whom qualify as small- to medium-sized businesses.

We appreciate the work your Ministry is doing to review and update the *Employment Standards Act* and we truly hope that you find a solution for paid sick leave that works for everyone, both employees and employers. Regarding your permanent paid sick leave proposed options, we urge you to pause and consult more closely with business owners and business associations across the province, including our Chamber.

Many of our Chamber members, especially small businesses and service sector employers, are fighting to survive. They are extremely concerned about the proposed paid sick leave details and implementation, and the resulting financial and operational costs employers will bear. For many businesses, this extra cost without any government support or compensation could mean their doors being closed for good.

One of our members, who owns a small business of 10 employees, wrote to us to express his frustration, in line with what we have heard from others as well: *"It's not ok for government to pontificate about how important small businesses are to jobs and the economy, and in the same breath make it more difficult for business to survive due to...downloading of legislated costs without compensation. ...I am in favour of some form of sick leave benefits for employees, but we need to see some benefit for paying the bills!"*

Another member, who owns a fast food franchise, wrote, *"I would suggest that this policy not be implemented in certain industries such as fast food... I don't think part-time employees should have access to this program... In my industry hiring teenagers...is very common. It's not feasible to provide paid sick leave to every 15-year-old kid that is working for you."*

These are but two examples of some of the themes we are hearing from our membership. While our Chamber is not opposed to paid sick leave, it is important to note that instituting 10 days of paid leave for employees would not only go well beyond the standard across Canadian jurisdictions, but would represent a major cost for businesses at this very difficult time.

Our Chamber has identified some alternative ways to make it possible for the business community to bear the extra costs of this proposal and still be able to keep their businesses afloat. To start, there should be clarity that these days would be earned at a prorated rate, and differentiating between different employment types. For example, full-time employees would earn a number of paid sick days per year and part-time employees would earn days proportional to their part-time position. It is not feasible for a business to provide a part-time employee who only works one or two shifts per week to earn sick leave credits at the same rate as a full-time employee.

Regarding the amount paid per day of sick leave, it is important to consider that the day should be paid at a reasonable percentage of the regular pay, such as 80%. This is already a common practice in unionized businesses in BC.

To make it verifiable and fair for both employees and employers, the regulation should allow businesses to require a note from the employee's physician supporting the absence. This should be done at no cost for the employer.

The regulation should establish clear parameters that businesses can follow. For example, paid sick time based on a calendar year that expires if not used, and employees who leave the business during the calendar year do not get paid out for any unused sick leave.

The regulation should provide ways to support businesses via financial incentives and fiscal solutions that would compensate at least part of the extra costs associated with its implementation, especially for small businesses that are already struggling to survive. Without any government support or compensation many businesses could see a steep decrease in their revenues which could result in closing their doors or reducing their labour force as an unintended consequence.

The BC Government should consider instituting incentives such as, but not limited to, a payroll tax credit or deduction for employers; an additional tax rebate for employee programs like extended health benefits, sick and family care time; a fiscal incentive for hiring and training programs.

Again, we want to thank you for the work being done to review and update the *Employment Standards Act*. Our Chamber looks forward to your response, and we welcome further discussion to develop viable solutions for businesses.

Sincerely,



Leslie Courchesne
Chief Executive Officer