



Employment and
Social Development Canada

Emploi et
Développement social Canada

**Canada Employment
Insurance Commission**

**Commission de l'assurance-emploi
du Canada**

Commissioner (Workers)

Commissaire (travailleurs et travailleuses)

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

December 6, 2019

The Honorable Minister Carla Qualtrough
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development
and Disability Inclusion
140 Promenade du Portage, Phase IV
Gatineau QC, K1A 0J9

Dear Minister Qualtrough:

We the groups assembled today for the Employment Insurance (EI) Commissioner's forum would like to wish you the best in your new functions as Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion. Given the current challenges facing Canadian workers, we can assure you of our support in the development of appropriate programs and policies.

Today we would like to bring to your attention the following considerations that are directly related to your government's ongoing actions and priorities.

We would like to start with the commitment for a **comprehensive review** of the EI program. This element is the only mandate commitment that your predecessor, Minister Jean-Yves Duclos, did not see through during his charge, **yet it is undeniably the most important one**. The EI program as it exists is failing far too many Canadian workers, more particularly those in precarious jobs. **Access** remains the most significant problem by far: this is because of the number of hours required to qualify as well as the existence of a variety of overly stringent disqualifications. The duration of benefits as well as the replacement rate also pose a problem. The program has become unnecessarily complex over the years and is in dire need of simplification. Attacking each of these issues piecemeal will not work; this is why we need a comprehensive review.

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In line with this, we commend the recognition by your predecessor of the special situation of **seasonal workers**. However, we think this issue will require more ambition than simply reconducting the current pilot program. There is a need to make it simpler to identify seasonal workers and to better adjust their benefit to survive through the low season.

On the **reform of the appeal process**, your predecessor did a remarkable job. Your government deserves praise for moving forward on this despite much internal denial and resistance from the senior bureaucracy. Bringing back tripartism at the heart of the adjudication process is more than just an improvement to the process, but goes back to the spirit that has animated the Commission since its creation in 1940. However, we feel there is a danger that the value-added of tripartite appeal boards might be negated by the addition of operational rules that will, in effect, mitigate the intended effect. We ask that attention be given to ensuring that stakeholders, and their representative at the Commission, truly have the space and authority they need so that tripartism really lives on.

On the **administrative side**, much improvement has followed from the Service Quality Review in 2016. However, there remains far too many irritants that stand in the way of proper service to claimants and that require attention. To this end, a number of groups present today are working to present you and the Department with concrete proposals to enhance service as well as improve the working conditions of people that serve Canadians everyday.

We are enthusiastic that your government will move to **extend the Sickness Benefit**. This is overdue as each year thousands of sick Canadians go without income support while they are often fighting for their lives. On this we feel, however, that consideration should be given to a potential longer period as well as modalities to deal with people with more periodic conditions. Since introducing this longer benefit will have an impact on currently existing wage loss plans, we also suggest consideration be given to ensure that the new measure does not have unforeseen perverse effects.

Last year, we took stock of the new **Canadian Training Benefit**. However, the consultations that followed the announcement revealed very limited interest in the measure. As it is construed, it is far too limited to make a difference for most adult workers wanting to seriously upskill. We respectfully suggest that your government either improves greatly the proposed benefit duration, or simply goes back to the drafting table and properly consult before adopting a new measure. In the same line, we note that Minister Patricia Hajdu, was moving forward on measures to **strengthen sector councils**. We would like to encourage you to revisit this, as the

sector level remains the weakest link, and yet an essential one, to build a proper institutional framework to address human resources and skills needs in Canada.

We are looking forward to working with you on these issues as well as those many others that will naturally spring up in the course of your mandate.

Regards,



Pierre Laliberté, Commissioner for Workers, CEIC on the behalf of the following organizations:

Action Chômage Côte Nord

Aide et Soutien aux travailleurs et travailleuses des secteurs saisonniers (New Brunswick)

Canada Building Trade Unions (CBTU)

Canadian Cancer Society

Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)

Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)

Centrales des Enseignants et Enseignantes du Québec (CSQ)

Commission des Ressources Humaines des Premières Nations du Québec

Community Legal Services of Ottawa

Confédération des Syndicats Démocratiques (CSD)

Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux (CSN)

Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO)

Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ)

Goods Jobs Coalition (Toronto)

Income Security Advocacy Centre

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)

International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE)

Mouvement Action-Chômage de St-Hyacinthe

National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE)

Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)

Teamsters Canada

Unemployment Workers Help Center (Regina)

Union of Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)

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