

March 19, 2020

Honourable Brian Pallister  
Premier of Manitoba  
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Honourable Scott Fielding  
Minister of Finance  
[minfin@leg.gov.mb.ca](mailto:minfin@leg.gov.mb.ca)

Mr. Wab Kinew  
Leader of the Official Opposition  
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Mr. Dougald Lamont  
Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party  
[Dougald.Lamont@leg.gov.mb.ca](mailto:Dougald.Lamont@leg.gov.mb.ca)

Dear Premier Pallister, Minister Fielding, Mr. Wab Kinew, and Mr. Dougald Lamont,

I am writing you to follow up on my letter of March 13, 2020, regarding the need to immediately implement at least 14 days of job-protected leave for all Manitoba workers in light of the COVID-19 outbreak. We can all appreciate that in a public health crisis such as this, decisive action is needed by our elected officials as new information comes to light and situations change. Manitobans are worried, and they are looking to their government for support to survive the financial and economic uncertainty ahead. Over the coming days and months, governments will need to enact a number of measures to protect the economic security of workers, families, and communities, including our most vulnerable community members. I trust that you are working hard on those very things right now.

With such a rapidly evolving and urgent situation, the Manitoba Federation of Labour is repeating its call for the Government of Manitoba to immediately implement at least 14 days of job-protected leave for all working Manitobans who need it.

Since I last wrote you, a number of things have happened with respect to workplaces and workers throughout our province. As you know, in addition to K – 12 public schools being ordered to close as of this coming Monday, all licensed child care centres are now suspending services effective end-of-day tomorrow. In addition, a number of businesses and non-profit organizations, including those in the service sector, have now voluntarily closed or reduced hours and services. More will close in the coming days.

The MFL is glad to hear that the government is committed to ensuring health care workers and essential services staff on the front lines in this battle against COVID-19 will be provided with child care, and we trust that this will be in a safe and high-quality environment.

We urge the government to make sure that the suspension of child care services does not undermine child care centre operations over the long-term. Child care plays a critical role in our economy, supporting working families and gender equality. Urgent government intervention is required to ensure that child care centre revenues and the incomes of early childhood educators are protected during this exceptional period, without charging parent fees for services which will not be available.

We also note the financial aid package announced by Prime Minister Trudeau yesterday. While the benefits planned for workers and businesses to help Canadians stay afloat over the coming weeks are a welcome step, they are not job-protected leave measures to ensure that workers receive wage-replacement and have a job to come back to. Our call is for full wage replacement for at least 14 days and job protection for workers who are forced not to work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whether someone is unable to go to work because they are sick, because they are staying home from work to care for their children due to school and child care closures, or because their workplace has shut down in the interest of public health, we owe it to all working Manitobans to provide a financial safety net to be able to stay afloat during this crisis.

This is particularly important for those Manitobans working in lower-wage jobs and in the service sector. The vast majority of these workers do not have job-protected paid leave provided by their employers. The Government of Manitoba needs to play its part in providing a financial bridge for workers who would otherwise go without pay during this time. At least 14 days of job-protected leave also needs to be made available to workers whose employers misclassify employees as “independent contractors” to avoid their obligations under Employment Standards rules.

Forcing workers into staying home in the interest of public health while their ability to pay the bills hangs in the balance is a problem that can be solved by action from government. If we are going to slow the spread of COVID-19 and ensure economic security for working people, we need to take bold action now.

In closing, I want to make specific mention of the heroic work that all health care workers are doing right now to fight this pandemic. We know that health care workers have been overworked and under-resourced for years now, with stress and under-resourcing mounting as a result of health care restructuring. I really do hope for the sake of all of us, that this government makes substantial investments in our health care system and our dedicated health care professionals to help combat this COVID-19 pandemic.

In Solidarity,



Kevin Rebeck  
President of the Manitoba Federation of Labour

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