



# **Manitoba Federation of Labour Submission to the Manitoba Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development on Bill 24**

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*The Social Services Appeal Board Amendment Act*

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**Manitoba Federation of Labour**

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## **Bill 24: *The Social Services Appeal Board Amendment Act***

The Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) is Manitoba's central labour body, representing the interests of more than 100,000 unionized workers. The MFL believes strongly that rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms belong to all people in Canada. We are deeply concerned about Bill 24, the Social Services Appeal Board Amendment Act, as it will decrease access to justice.

In fact, this incredibly short bill has only one purpose: to put up barriers to justice for many of Manitoba's most vulnerable citizens, including the unemployed, working poor and workers/persons with disabilities.

The Social Services Appeal Board (SSAB) hears appeals from individuals who depend on social services to make ends meet, like Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), Rent Assist, Community Living disABILITY Services and child care subsidies. Under current law, when a Manitoban experiences an infringement of their Charter rights resulting in the denial of a social service or support, they are permitted to make constitutional arguments in their appeal to the SSAB. But this bill would take that ability away by changing the mandate of the SSAB to prevent the tribunal from considering Charter rights in its review of social service appeals.

This means that people who are already struggling financially, some of the most vulnerable people in our communities, and have experienced their Charter rights being violated will have no other recourse than to launch a challenge through the court system, an incredibly expensive, cumbersome and often exhausting process. But in reality, it is far more likely that they will simply go without the services and supports they need, representing a denial of justice.

Government should be focused on making it easier for all people to exercise their Charter rights, not more difficult. Since tribunals, commissions, and boards like the SSAB are

often significantly faster and far less expensive for appellants than the traditional court process, they serve a very important role in helping citizens access and stand up for their own legal rights.

Access to justice is a fundamental principle in a free, fair and democratic society, and one that the labour movement has always fought for. Unfortunately, this bill would take our province in the opposite direction.

We believe that the Pallister government should withdraw this bill immediately to prevent the negative impacts it will have on some of Manitoba's most vulnerable citizens. There has been no meaningful consultation with the community on the impacts of this bill and how vulnerable Manitobans will be able to access justice if the bill is passed.

Barring full withdrawal, we believe that the government should make ample resources available for the use of vulnerable Manitobans to make Charter challenges through the court system, as that is, in effect, what this government is forcing Manitobans to do by removing their right to make Charter challenges through the SSAB.

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