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May 4, 2021

The Honourable Harry Bains
Minister of Labour
Legislative Assembly of BC

SUBJECT: TEMPORARY PAID SICK LEAVE PROGRAM FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

Dear Minister Bains:

We thank you for speaking to the recent COVID-19 Industry Engagement Table on the topic of temporary paid sick leave. As many of our business association colleagues have indicated, a temporary paid sick leave program is essential to ensure individuals and businesses are able adequately manage the health and economic challenges arising from COVID-19. Temporary paid sick leave is a fundamental requirement for the economic recovery of Surrey and British Columbia.

The Surrey Board of Trade recognizes that offering employees paid sick leave will greatly benefit businesses already effected by the pandemic. In the United States the introduction of a temporary paid sick leave resulted in an estimated 50% reduction in the number of COVID-19 cases per state per day. It is our understanding that a majority of businesses have acknowledged the value in this benefit by reducing the incidence of transmission of the virus thereby reducing critical impacts to the labour force, lost opportunities, costs to employers and lost wages.

Currently, paid sick days are largely the responsibility of the employer, which in the absence of a temporary universal program, access to paid sick days is very inequitable. Not all workers have employers that offer paid sick leave – especially for essential or frontline workers – many of whom are in Surrey. During this unprecedented pandemic, we all benefit when sick workers can afford to stay home, especially service workers who are less likely to be covered by existing programs.

In BC we are behind in creating a paid sick leave program that works for all businesses and all workers. Yukon for example created a paid sick leave program more than a year ago. In addition, the existing Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB) cannot financially protect essential workers in following all public health measures, places the administrative burden of applying for the benefit on essential workers, and neither provides sufficient, nor timely payments.

Some considerations for paid sick leave:

- expanding access to paid sick leave to self-employed workers;
- taking over employer obligations to finance sick pay;
- ensuring that temporary foreign workers have access to sick pay;



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- make the application process easy and simple for the employer to receive a level of reimbursement per employee for sick pay; and,
- implement mechanisms to prevent absenteeism and promote return to work.

Beyond temporary paid sick leave, government should also focus on active health and safety enforcement efforts for high risk workplaces, where workers come in close proximity with co-workers or clients. As well, a deeper conversation will need to occur with the private sector related to structural paid sick leave reforms and needs to appear on the agenda once the pandemic is over. Those discussions should include:

- improving access to paid sick leave for the entire workforce;
- promoting prevention of sickness and the return to work of recovered workers; and,
- preparing for future pandemics by improving the adaptability of paid sick leave systems.

We look forward to hearing about an announcement soon in BC that covers the entire workforce, with a focus on return to work, and that covers the costs of employers expediently.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Huberman', written in a cursive style.

H. Captain (Navy) Anita Huberman
CEO, Surrey Board of Trade

cc. Trevor Hughes, Deputy Minister of Labour