



ONTARIO
FEDERATION OF
LABOUR

ONTARIO IS IN CRISIS:

**We need immediate action now *and*
a commitment to long-term solutions**

Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and
Economic Affairs

2022 Pre-Budget Consultations
January 26, 2022

ONTARIO FEDERATION
OF LABOUR
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The Ontario Federation of Labour represents 54 unions and one million workers. It is Canada's largest provincial labour federation.

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PREAMBLE

It's been a tough two years for Ontario workers.

Since the first lockdown in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted all aspects of their lives, and none more so than their conditions of work: when, where, and how they work—or whether they work at all. In the last 22 months, their world and ours has been turned upside down.

COVID's impact has been devastating. More than ten thousand Ontarians have died from the virus or related illnesses, including people who caught it at work.

While corporations have raked in billions in profit, workers have faced growing uncertainty, precarity, mental health stress, and exposure to COVID in the workplace. Some have suffered temporary lay-offs or permanent job losses. Many who got sick couldn't afford to take time off. Frontline workers, especially in health care and long-term care, worked punishing hours (and continue to do so), with few or inadequate health protections, and in an environment where lives are at stake: theirs and the people they care for.

No one has been untouched by the pandemic, but the hardest hit have been women, workers of colour, migrant workers, people with disabilities, and members of other equity-seeking groups.

And to make things worse, Ontarians' experience of the pandemic has been compounded by government decisions and policies that put the needs of businesses ahead of the public's health and well-being.

Without a doubt, the COVID death toll in Ontario is higher because of these backwards priorities.

For many working people, including those who lost loved ones or co-workers to preventable COVID deaths, reversing these policies has become a life-or-death matter.

This isn't the only lesson we learned from the pandemic. We saw how COVID exposed the deep inequities of our economic system, and made them much worse.

We saw the consequences, both before the pandemic and at its height, of putting profit before people and ignoring the science to keep us safe.

We saw how the longstanding demands of the labour movement—for decent work, safe working conditions, and well-funded public services—could have saved lives and dramatically minimized the impact of the pandemic, but only if governments had implemented them instead of ignoring them for years.

We were reminded of the value of the work Ontario workers do every single day, that the economy can't function without them, and that the workers we rely on most—those who feed us, care for us, and look after us when we're sick—are often the ones with the least support, the lowest pay, and the worst conditions.

And we realized that, even in the most difficult circumstances, from lockdowns to stay-at-home orders, workers must continue to raise their demands, to defend their jobs and communities.

This submission by the Ontario Federation of Labour draws on the collective work of the 54 unions that comprise our federation, representing one million Ontario workers, and consolidates their demands into the list of comprehensive recommendations that follow.

They are organized under six broad themes:

- › A just recovery
- › Justice for workers
- › Healthy and safe workplaces
- › Equity, racial justice, and real reconciliation
- › Universal, accessible, and well-funded public services
- › Climate justice and a livable planet

Together, these themes cover the most urgent demands that Ontario workers have raised in the recent history of the labour movement, as well as new demands that have emerged in the course of the pandemic.

They also address the urgent action that the Ford government must take immediately to address the Omicron crisis—an emergency situation—that is currently facing the entire province.

Working people need a just recovery—not only from COVID, but also from a system that has put our livelihoods, our lives, and our planet at risk.

The success of that recovery will depend on two things: whether the government will take the urgent required actions in the short term to address the worsening public health crisis in Ontario, and whether its long-term approach includes serious, significant, and meaningful re-investment in all our public services and the infrastructure of government that helps ensure the health, safety, and futures of all Ontarians.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

Two facts stand out about the 2022 pre-Budget consultations.

The first fact is that this document marks the fourth pre-Budget submission the OFL has made to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs under Doug Ford's government. As we have for previous submissions, we have prepared this one in good faith to make serious, thoughtful, and carefully researched recommendations that we believe will benefit all Ontarians, but only if the government takes them seriously.

Unfortunately, despite our good-faith approach, and numerous attempts to engage on the most urgent matters affecting Ontario workers, this government has shown little to no interest in listening to their concerns. They deserve better.

The second fact is that these consultations are taking place in the midst of an unprecedented public health crisis in Ontario. Much of this crisis, especially its devastating effects on frontline workers, remains invisible to this government.

Just weeks into 2022, Ontarians are witnessing the collapse of our health care system. Health care workers are burnt out, demoralized, and getting sick in the thousands. Women and racialized workers are among the hardest hit.

Many health care workers are leaving their jobs, or have left already—as the only viable means to protect themselves. A massive staff shortage is intensifying pressure on the remaining workforce. Ambulances are tied up for hours as understaffed hospitals and paramedic services struggle to offload patients. Long-term care facilities are appealing to nearby restaurants and hotels to help feed their residents.

As Omicron spreads to all regions of the province, we're running out of beds and tens of thousands of surgeries have been cancelled. Our health care system is rapidly approaching its breaking point.

The crisis is everywhere.

Schools aren't equipped to protect students and education workers. Staff are being forced to work in conditions that fuel the spread of COVID-19. Families are terrified about their kids getting sick, but the lack of affordable child care means they can't take time off work to keep them at home.

Most Ontarians still don't have access to paid sick days. Too many workers must choose between going to work sick or staying home and losing pay. When workers try to isolate, they can't access testing to show their employers they're sick.

Meanwhile, private for-profit testing centres are popping up to fill

the void, providing coverage for those who can shell out hundreds of dollars per test. This government's failure to properly fund our health care system has accelerated the drive to privatized, two-tier health care.

These two facts—the government's refusal to heed the expert advice of frontline workers these last four years, and the unprecedented public health crisis facing Ontarians today—are directly related.

Decisions that we knew would be bad for Ontario workers turned out exactly as we predicted. But it gets worse. Those bad decisions meant that Ontarians would be less prepared for the pandemic when it hit, and harder hit by its effects.

The decision to cancel paid sick days three years ago meant more Ontarians would catch COVID at work and be forced to lose pay or go to work when they got sick.

The decision to pass Bills 124 and 195 meant more than an attack on free collective bargaining in Ontario; it worsened a longstanding staffing crisis and drove thousands of health care workers out of the system.

The decision to cancel the \$15 minimum wage increase in 2018 and freeze it for two years meant minimum wage workers lost an average of \$3,200 in income; in total, it cost them \$1.7 billion.

And when the pandemic exposed the folly of these decisions, instead of changing course, the government dug in its heels.

Instead of providing adequate and accessible employer-paid sick leave, the government voted against it 27 times.

Instead of scrapping laws that failed to recruit and retain the tens of thousands of health care staff our system needs, the government leaned on frontline workers and retirees to do the extra work for free.

Instead of helping low-wage workers who can barely make ends meet, the government is contemplating a carve-out of the *Employment Standards Act* that would entrench precarious conditions for the most vulnerable workers.

Now all of us are paying the price.

On January 20, 2022, the OFL joined with frontline workers in health care, long-term care, and education to make six urgent demands of the government. Their demands are expressed in [this statement](#) and as follows:

1. **Recall the legislature** for an emergency session to address the deepening public health crisis facing Ontarians.
2. **Repeal Bills 124 & 195**, two of the greatest contributing factors to the unprecedented staffing crisis in our health care system. Bill 124 prevents employers from providing urgently needed supports to recruit and retain health care workers. Bill 124 has also negatively impacted hundreds of thousands of public and broader public sector workers in education, child care, and social services. Similarly, Bill 195 has empowered employers to attack frontline workers' labour rights and is unnecessarily adding to the burn-out of health care workers.
3. **Legislate a minimum of ten permanent employer-paid sick days** for all workers in the province, and ensure an additional 14 paid sick days during the pandemic. Workers who contract COVID at work must also have greater access to WSIB support.
4. **Hold an emergency summit of all stakeholders in the health care system** and develop a rapid response plan to hire the tens of thousands of registered nurses, registered practical nurses, personal support workers, and other health care

workers required to address the staffing crisis. In the long term, Ontario requires a strategy to address the chronic underfunding of health care and other public services.

5. Require health care and educational institutions to provide airborne precautions to staff, patients, residents, and students, including fit-tested respirators for staff (e.g., N95s), enhanced ventilation (e.g., HEPA filters), and appropriate social distancing measures (e.g., smaller class sizes). The same protections must be extended to frontline workers in grocery stores, food service, transit, and other essential sectors.

6. Launch an emergency public health campaign to communicate the urgency of the situation facing Ontarians and to build broad public support for a comprehensive public health strategy.

These demands represent the bare minimum of what is required to confront the Omicron emergency, but they are only a start. We also need significant long-term investments, starting in this Budget, and articulated in the rest of this document, to rebuild our public services and guarantee the health, safety, and future of all Ontarians.

But the success of any long-term strategy depends on whether the government recognizes the seriousness and unprecedented nature of the crisis facing Ontarians right now—and acts accordingly.

Ontario is in crisis. We urgently need the Ford government to act now.

A JUST RECOVERY

As Ontario workers grapple with the impact of a fifth wave, and prepare for the possibility of more to come, they can't afford to leave their futures in the hands of decision-makers that put profit before people.

Ontario workers must be front and centre in the discussions, debates, and decisions about how to emerge from the pandemic and bring COVID under control. Whatever recovery emerges cannot be at the expense of working people and their families.

Ontario workers need a just recovery. That means:

- › Opposing anti-Asian racism and other forms of racism, discrimination, xenophobia, and hate that target racialized and newcomer communities in response to the pandemic
- › Protecting the right of all Ontario workers to a healthy and safe workplace through access to vaccines, rapid testing, and other key precautionary measures
- › Implementing a comprehensive immunization strategy based on the framework developed by workers and their representatives—in consultation with scientists, medical experts, and public health officials—in the OFL's "Follow the Science, Enforce the Law, Protect Workers" [toolkit](#), including:
- › Providing enhanced and sufficient ventilation, including government-mandated and funded assessments and upgrades for all essential public institutions
- › Ensuring strong Ministry enforcement of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*
- › Conducting frequent hazard assessments that consider all forms of transmission and variants
- › Providing adequate and highest-level Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including direct, appropriate respiratory protection for all workers
- › Reviewing transmission infection and control measures, before and after outbreaks
- › Conducting proper, immediate exposure investigations that include contact tracing
- › Engaging workers, joint committees, and unions in a genuine consultation process
- › Paying workers fair and swift compensation, including paid time to receive vaccinations and to recover from any side effects, and paid sick leave when symptomatic or when isolating
- › Actively following the precautionary principle when it comes to recognizing airborne transmission of COVID-19 and implementing the necessary hierarchy of controls

- › Promoting vaccination and other public health measures in multilingual, culturally sensitive, and inclusive information campaigns in consultation with local communities and their representatives
- › Assessing, accounting for, and responding to the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women, workers of colour, migrant workers, people with disabilities, and members of other equity-seeking groups
- › Legislating a minimum of 10 job-protected, employer-paid emergency leave days per year for all workers, plus 14 additional paid days during public health outbreaks
- › Preventing employers from requesting doctors' notes to access paid sick days, permanently
- › Making pandemic pay permanent and expanding its eligibility
- › Ensuring that all public services, especially health care and long-term care, have extra capacity, including adequate staffing levels and properly maintained resources such as ventilators and PPE, to handle surges in demand during pandemics or other emergencies
- › Ending staff shortages among front-line workers in health care and long-term care and developing a long-term strategy to train, recruit, and retain front-line workers
- › Legislating at least four hours of hands-on care per resident per day in every long-term care facility in Ontario
- › Imposing a moratorium on home evictions for the duration of the pandemic
- › Opposing violent police evictions of park-based encampments
- › Reducing class sizes, as required during the pandemic, while maintaining adequate levels of staffing and educational support in primary and secondary schools
- › Ensuring that all post-secondary institutions enforce smaller in-person class sizes, including social distancing, and campaigning for full vaccinations for all staff and students attending in-person classes, including all students living in campus residences
- › Providing family status accommodation to workers who have child care and/or elder care requirements while working remotely and/or while their usual supports are unavailable

JUSTICE FOR WORKERS

Ontario workers were right to fight for justice for workers, both before and during the pandemic. Their longstanding demands for decent work, safe working conditions, and justice at work were vindicated by everything COVID exposed. Imagine how many lives could have been saved if workers had access to paid sick days when they needed it, or if frontline workers had the protections they needed when exposed to the virus.

As workers fight for a just recovery from COVID, they also raise the demand for a just recovery from an economic system and government policies that continue to put profit ahead of workers, public health, and their communities.

Ontario workers need justice for workers. That means:

- › Introducing a \$20 minimum wage and removing all exemptions for students, liquor servers, farm workers, and other workers
- › Ensuring that job-protected paid leave covers survivors of domestic and/or sexual violence, without the need for disclosure
- › Restoring and expanding equal pay for equal work standards, with greater enforcement and no loopholes, regardless of gender, racialization, immigration status, or status as part-time, contract, or temporary agency workers
- › Restoring and expanding fair scheduling laws that would guarantee workers a minimum number of hours per week, additional hours for existing workers, and sufficient notice of work schedules
- › Requiring employers to provide pay transparency so workers can enforce equal pay and help fight gender- and race-based wage discrimination
- › Strengthening protections for temporary agency workers, including making companies responsible for agency workers' injuries, working conditions, and collective bargaining
- › Ensuring all temporary agency workers are hired directly by the client company after three months of work and providing protections against being terminated before the three-month deadline if another temporary worker is hired to do the same work
- › Rejecting the proposals and recommendations of the so-called Ontario Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee
- › Implementing the [Gig Workers' Bill of Rights](#) and ending the misclassification of gig workers
- › Guaranteeing that all workers, including migrant, undocumented, and gig workers, are covered under the *Employment Standards Act (ESA)* or the *Labour Relations Act (LRA)*, with no loopholes or exemptions

- › Working with the federal government to ensure the provision of permanent residency status upon arrival for all new migrant workers and permanent residency status for all migrant and undocumented workers already here
- › Ensuring job protection against unjust dismissal for workers who stand up for their rights at work, including during union drives and the certification process
- › Moving to a sectoral bargaining model in recognition of the reality that collective bargaining no longer only occurs between one union and one employer within an individual workplace
- › Removing barriers for non-unionized workers to unionize their workplaces and providing access to workplace information when a union is engaged in an organizing drive
- › Extending card-based certification to all sectors
- › Making it easier to certify a union across franchises and sub-contractors
- › Empowering workers to hold all employers accountable when they have contravened the *LRA*
- › Providing automatic access to first-contract arbitration in all cases
- › Extending successor rights to all contracted services, including the protection of wages, benefits, seniority rights, and union coverage, and ending contract flipping
- › Guaranteeing the right of employees to return to work following a lawful strike or lockout, without the threat of reprisal
- › Legislating robust anti-scab laws
- › Repealing Bills 124 and 195 and ending government interference in the collective bargaining process, including the use of back-to-work legislation, replacement workers, and legislated maximums on bargained working conditions and forms of compensation
- › Highlighting workers' rights, consumer protection, and tax compliance in all new and emerging business models
- › Increasing access to meaningful paid work-integrated learning opportunities for students
- › Strengthening benefit security for existing pension plan members and expanding coverage to the millions without any employer pension plan
- › Promoting defined benefit pension plans over all other retirement schemes
- › Prioritizing workers' wages, severance pay, and pension funds over all other creditors in the case of bankruptcy
- › Increasing pension insurance coverage to reflect inflationary pressures
- › Ensuring members have a voice when significant changes are made to pension plan funding

GIG WORKERS' BILL OF RIGHTS:

- › A worker is a worker: Full employment rights with no carve-outs from minimum wage, sick leave, vacation pay, and other minimum employment standards.
- › Payment for *all* hours of work: Paid time from when workers sign in until they sign out of the app with a clear and concise breakdown of how pay is calculated.
- › Compensation for necessary work related expenses to ensure gig workers' *real* wages are not reduced below the minimum wage.
- › Full and equal access to regulated benefits programs like Employment Insurance (EI), Canada Pension Plan (CPP), and injury compensation (WSIB).
- › Data transparency: Access to all data collected and how the algorithm affects workers, including any forms of discipline.
- › Make all work count: Gig work must count towards Permanent Residency applications.
- › Put onus on employers to prove that workers are not employees, instead of workers proving that they are not independent contractors. Enshrine the predictable and purposive ABC test for employment status.
- › Recognize gig workers' right to form a union, with the union they choose, to have a collective voice at work.
- › Workers must have the right to negotiate for livable wages and benefits with their employer. Real, worker-led sectoral bargaining to enable meaningful collective bargaining to raise industry standards.
- › An end to arbitrary deactivations. The guarantee of fair compensation for glitches: Just cause protection against deactivation, access to a clear and free process, and enforcement mechanisms for minimum standards. Compensation for technical issues on the platform's end.

BILL OF RIGHTS

Employee status

By Default

Right to form a union

The right to negotiate

No arbitrary deactivations, compensation for app glitches

Sign on to support

HEALTHY AND SAFE WORKPLACES

Throughout the pandemic, Ontario workers have continued to fight for improved and expanded access to a workers' compensation system when they are injured, poisoned, or killed. Shamefully, nearly one quarter of Ontario workers have no such protection. For workers who do, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) has prioritized its own cost reductions at their expense. In 2018, the WSIB slashed employer premiums by nearly 30 percent, following a 10 percent cut in previous years. By 2019, they announced another 17 percent reduction.

In 2021, the government announced plans allowing the WSIB to hand over billions of its surplus to employers and further reduce their premiums, instead of supporting the injured workers who need it, nearly half of whom live in poverty.

These decisions affect workers' health and sometimes cost them their lives.

Among those who suffered workplace-related COVID deaths were health care workers, long-term care workers, and migrant farm workers, while additional workplace deaths were recorded amongst other crucial front-line workers. In September 2019, another temporary agency worker died at Fiera Foods in North York, the fifth death since 1999 at the company or one of its affiliates. Twenty-two workplace deaths took place at construction sites in 2020, seven of them in December alone. In July 2021, a residential counsellor was murdered at work in a supportive living home.

The OFL mourns and remembers these workers, and all others who suffered work-related injury, disease, or death in Ontario. At the same time, we continue our fight for the living and to ensure that no more workers are injured, get sick, or are killed at work.

Ontario workers need healthy and safe workplaces. That means:

- › Opposing any and all forms of discrimination and/or harassment in the workplace, including on *Ontario Human Rights Code*-based grounds
- › Including psychosocial hazards in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*
- › Ensuring that labour-governed organizations are prioritized and properly funded, including the Workers Health and Safety Centre, Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, and Prevention Link

- › Introducing the precautionary principle approach for all new substances, processes, or job designs in the workplace
- › Ensuring that health and safety training, as well as disability prevention training, remains delivered by workers for workers in classroom settings (in-person)
- › Increasing the frequency and scope of pre-emptive workplace inspections (in-person) by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development
- › Implementing a zero-tolerance policy for toxic and lethal substances, including asbestos, in workplaces and ensuring strong enforcement
- › Implementing the full recommendations of the independent review conducted by Dr. Paul Demers into the work-relatedness of cancer (Jan. 2020), the Expert Advisory Panel on Occupational Health and Safety (Dec. 2010), and the SARS Commission (Dec. 2006)
- › Providing universal workers' compensation for every worker in Ontario who needs it
- › Ensuring that any WSIB surplus is directed to injured workers, and not handed over to employers
- › Expanding the definition of occupational diseases so workers are treated fairly and without discrimination
- › Abolishing the unfair practice of "deeming" at the WSIB
- › Requiring employer criminal negligence to become a routine part of every workplace death investigation
- › Holding employers accountable for the health and safety of their workers and prosecuting negligent employers for killing workers
- › Making companies that use temporary agencies financially responsible under the WSIB for workplace deaths and injuries
- › Expanding the requirement for a mandatory inquest into a workplace-based death from construction and mining to all other sectors, including agriculture

EQUITY, RACIAL JUSTICE, AND REAL RECONCILIATION

Just as the pandemic exposed the deep economic inequities of the system, it also exposed its racism and sexism: racialized, Indigenous, migrant, and low-wage workers—many of them women—disproportionately occupy jobs with no access to paid sick days and with greater exposure to the virus. Just six months after the first lockdown, racialized communities made up 83% of all COVID infections in Toronto. Black people, who represent just nine percent of the city's total population, accounted for 21% of infections.

On top of greater infection rates and less access to health care and vaccines, racialized communities also faced an increase in hate crimes, especially people of Asian descent, and the baseless blame for spreading the virus.

In reality, it was structural racism, the lack of decent work and paid sick days, and government negligence and incompetence that made racialized communities more vulnerable to COVID's impact than other groups.

Beyond the pandemic, the broader fight against racism exploded. On May 25, 2020, the world watched in horror the racist police murder of George Floyd, whose death was captured in a seven-minute video. Protests erupted globally under the banner of **#BlackLivesMatter**. Suddenly, another pandemic was visible: systemic anti-Black racism.

The following year, we learned the painful truth—what Indigenous communities have been trying to tell us for years—about the existence of mass, unmarked graves of Indigenous children at former residential school sites in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, Brandon, Cowessess, Kootenay, and Penelakut Island, while investigations were launched at nearly 20 more locations. Tens of thousands joined protests against the continuing genocide of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

On June 6, 2021, four members of a Muslim family in London, Ontario were killed in a terror attack motivated by Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred. Thousands attended a vigil at London Muslim Mosque two days later, with outpourings of grief across the entire country.

In response to these and other racist acts of violence, Ontario workers continued to show their solidarity, mobilize and educate each other, and support communities and organizations that have long been leading the fight for racial justice.

Likewise, the government must adopt policies and practices that support the demands of movements and struggles against oppression,

both within our workplaces and in our communities.

None of us are free until all of us are free.

Ontario workers need equity, racial justice, and real reconciliation. That means:

- › Promoting justice and equity by repairing historic, discontinuing current, and preventing future oppression of Indigenous communities, Black communities, communities of colour, migrant communities, immigrants and refugees, deindustrialized communities, depopulated rural communities, as well as other affected communities and groups
- › Implementing a whole-of-government approach that is equity-focused and intersectional: anti-colonialist, anti-racist, feminist, anti-ableist, anti-ageist, and 2SLGBTQI+ inclusive
- › Challenging sexism, misogyny, racism, bigotry, xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, ageism, as well as bigger systems of oppression such as white supremacy, settler-colonialism, right-wing populism, imperialism, fascism, and others at every level of the government, and throughout Ontario
- › Eliminating systemic anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism, including from government bodies, departments, agencies, etc. such as school boards, children's aid societies, the workforce, and decision-making structures
- › Ending police killings of Black and Indigenous people and communities
- › Defunding police institutions and services, redirecting funds allocated to overfunded police budgets towards public services, especially social and mental health supports, in the communities
- › Developing and implementing alternatives to police services, including decriminalization, disarmament, demilitarization, and other abolition strategies
- › Supporting and funding community-driven and -led solutions to community safety and well-being
- › Abolishing the discriminatory practice of racial profiling, such as police carding
- › Strengthening and expanding the scope and mandate of the Anti-Racism Directorate
- › Adopting the 94 recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- › Recognizing September 30, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, as a statutory holiday in Ontario
- › Taking immediate action on prosperity for all Indigenous peoples, including, but not limited to, access to clean water, housing, and food security
- › Ensuring that the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls reflects and supports the needs of Indigenous communities
- › Ensuring the full implementation of all demands of the [final report](#) of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
- › Funding local and regional initiatives that support meaningful processes of reconciliation and decolonization, especially within education, health care, and other public services
- › Working with the federal government to ensure permanent resident status and family unity for all current migrants and refugees, as well as landed status on arrival for those in the future
- › Establishing Ontario as a sanctuary province for those with precarious status and who have been harmed by policies of exclusion

- › Closing the wage gap through funding, enforcing, and expanding pay equity and employment equity legislation
- › Implementing an economic justice strategy that promotes women's meaningful participation in the workforce, recognizes the care penalty imposed in female-dominated employment, and improves access to public services and programs, such as child care
- › Ending violence against women through a comprehensive action framework that focuses on prevention, supports, and services
- › Breaking down barriers for workers with accommodations and facilitating the integration of people with disabilities into every aspect of the workplace and society
- › Establishing the Disability Rights Secretariat
- › Investing to eliminate homophobia and transphobia and making it safe for people to live authentically
- › Ensuring that 2SLGBTQI+ people have access to appropriate and timely health care options that are friendly and competent and meet their respective needs
- › Addressing the prevalence of suicide attempts among 2SLGBTQI+ youth through increased supports, such as mental health services, housing, and other supports
- › Ending violence against Trans peoples, including those who identify through an intersectional lens
- › Restoring general funding for all Legal Aid Ontario services and improving access
- › Removing restrictions on Legal Aid Ontario funding for immigration and refugee cases
- › Filling all adjudicator vacancies and expanding the number of adjudicators, especially BIPOC adjudicators, at the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario
- › Providing sufficient resources to eliminate the backlog of cases at the Immigration and Refugee Board and the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario

UNIVERSAL, ACCESSIBLE, AND WELL-FUNDED PUBLIC SERVICES

When everybody has access to the public services they need, all of us benefit.

In study after study, in country after country, research shows that universal, accessible, and well-funded public services create greater health, employment, and prosperity for everyone.

In other words, good public services help us achieve equality and a more equitable society.

But despite these obvious benefits, including the long-term savings they generate for governments, public services in Ontario and across Canada have been under attack for years. The same trend is visible in almost every other industrialized country around the world.

The decision to cut public services is not accidental. It's all about priorities.

Even before the pandemic, successive government attacks on our public services, on the workers who provide them, and on everyone who uses them put all of Ontario at risk.

As we struggle to contain the fifth wave, and brace ourselves for more to come, we know that public services do more than keep us healthy and safe. They save lives.

Ontario workers need universal, accessible, and well-funded public services. That means:

- › Ensuring that big corporations and the rich pay their fair share of taxes, including taxes that remain unpaid or on undeclared or hidden revenue
- › Establishing, investing in, and improving access to publicly delivered universal services and programs—such as health care, mental health care, pharma care, dental care, eye and vision care, child care, long-term care, housing, elementary and secondary education, post-secondary education, social and community services, and public pensions—for all residents of Ontario

- › Providing public services in an inclusive and equitable manner and centering equity concerns in the design, delivery, and expansion of services
- › Stopping the privatization of our public services and assets, including Crown corporations, as well as our health care, education, child care, infrastructure systems, and any other service or program
- › Guaranteeing professional-level wages for all public sector workers
- › Increasing annual hospital funding to protect and expand service levels and rebuild capacity, including a greater availability of beds in regular care and Intensive Care Units
- › Ending staff shortages among front-line workers in health care and long-term care and developing a long-term strategy to train, recruit, and retain front-line workers
- › Ensuring that all work in health care and long-term care is decent work, with full-time employment, job security, and access to paid sick days, benefits, pensions, and a livable wage, with the recently instituted temporary \$3 Personal Support Worker pay increase made permanent and extended to all health care workers
- › Legislating at least four hours of hands-on care per resident per day in every long-term care facility in Ontario
- › Restoring province-wide standards of care in long-term care, funding them properly, and implementing them by legislation in the *Time to Care Act*
- › Making all long-term care public and not-for-profit
- › Expanding access to home care for seniors living at home
- › Declaring the opioid crisis a public health emergency
- › Ensuring universal access to mental health, addiction, treatment consumption, and overdose prevention services and infrastructure and investing in harm reduction strategies
- › Imposing a moratorium on evictions for the duration of the pandemic
- › Creating a comprehensive provincial social housing program that treats housing as a public utility
- › Implementing a comprehensive housing strategy that provides housing for unhoused people and secures housing for people in precarious accommodation
- › Creating non-profit, affordable (capped at \$10 a day) child care spaces, as well as ending the licensing of new for-profit child care centres
- › Providing enhanced and sufficient ventilation, including government-mandated and funded assessments and upgrades, for primary and secondary schools and all essential public institutions
- › Reducing class sizes, as required during the pandemic and according to best practices in non-pandemic circumstances, while maintaining adequate levels of staffing and educational support in schools
- › Increasing supports for students with special education needs in primary and secondary schools
- › Exempting public institutions, including colleges and universities, from the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA)*, federal legislation designed to guide private-sector companies through insolvency
- › Restoring funding to Laurentian University to rehire laid-off faculty and staff and reverse all cuts to undergraduate and graduate programs

- › Eliminating tuition fees for all post-secondary students and ensuring that the overall cost of post-secondary education is publicly funded
- › Implementing a system of non-repayable grants to fund students' cost of living while enrolled in college or university
- › Cancelling all student debt
- › Increasing social assistance rates and Ontario Disability Support Payment (ODSP) to well above the poverty line
- › Implementing a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy that ensures food and housing security, access to education and job training, employment opportunities, and other supports
- › Expanding access to social assistance for all persons regardless of their immigration status and providing supports with dignity, care, and respect
- › Providing funding to provincial, regional, and municipal agencies, departments, programs, etc. that provide the public with increased access to community centres, recreational centres, sports and leisure activities, cultural centres, museums and galleries, libraries, and the Arts

CLIMATE JUSTICE AND A LIVABLE PLANET

Our planet is burning.

And not just in a figurative sense, it is actually on fire. In the last year, devastating wildfires have raged out of control in California and the Pacific Northwest; in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario; and in Greece, Turkey, and the south of France.

Unprecedented heatwaves are now the norm in regions more accustomed to cool or moderate weather. The result is prolonged drought, bone-dry conditions, failing crops, the disappearance of grasslands and forests, and a long and dangerous fire season.

In British Columbia, two whole communities—Lytton and Monte Lake—were completely wiped out in a matter of hours. Every home, building, and vehicle was burnt to a crisp, while residents fled to neighbouring communities where they still faced evacuation warnings.

Every year, the Earth's temperature continues to rise. The six warmest years on record have all been since 2015, with 2016 and 2020 tying for the hottest years ever.

Sadly, the government has so far demonstrated an unwillingness to be part of a serious and meaningful climate justice solution. Its approach, like it is to public services, has been to push deregulation, privatization, and for-profit models. By contrast, workers—and the planet—need public, not-for-profit solutions, including a public green energy strategy for the province, that addresses the needs of workers, our communities, and the environment, all in harmony with each other.

Ontario workers need climate justice and a livable planet. That means:

- › Securing for all people clean air and water, climate and community resiliency, healthy food, access to nature, and a sustainable environment
- › Improving the public's access to provincial parks and other publicly-managed green spaces
- › Achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through a fair and just transition for all communities and workers, with meaningful community input from communities and labour
- › Demanding that governments play the central role in leading a fair and just transition of the economy and ensure that corporations, for-profit bodies, and the private sector adhere to all climate-related legislation, policies, practices, etc.

- › Creating millions of decent, high-wage jobs and transforming low-carbon jobs into good jobs, while expanding low-carbon sectors
- › Ensuring that climate justice solutions respect and support Indigenous sovereignty, racial and gender justice, and other equity concerns
- › Developing public, not-for-profit green energy solutions
- › Improving, repairing, and expanding infrastructure that provides climate justice solutions, such as building mass transit systems within and between cities and regions and creating high-quality affordable housing near places of work
- › Supporting divestment and meaningful green investment strategies regarding the responsible management of pension funds
- › Restoring environmental regulations, policies, reporting mechanisms, etc. that have been eliminated or weakened by the Ford government
- › Holding big corporate polluters responsible for their actions
- › Imposing bigger fines and greater penalties for corporate and business practices that harm the environment

CONCLUSION

The recommendations we have developed in these pages represent both a diagnosis of the problems, issues, and concerns that Ontario workers and their families currently face in this province and a prescription of what they need to turn things around, stop the attacks on their communities and their standards of living, and create a sustainable future for all Ontarians.

This is not a wish-list. These demands are not only urgently needed, but are also completely achievable.

The pandemic has taught us many lessons and confirmed things we already knew to be true: that government policies that put profit ahead of people are a real threat to the health, safety, and well-being of all Ontarians.

With more than 10,000 COVID deaths, the pandemic also reminded us of the stakes.

We urge the government to act immediately on both the urgent required actions to address, minimize, and end the Omicron emergency, as part of a broader strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic, and the longer-term measures, including a commitment to re-invest in all our public services, that would ensure the health, safety, and futures of every single person in our province.



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