

August 17, 2020

Ms. Nancy Chahwan  
Chief Human Resources Officer  
Treasury Board Secretariat  
90 Elgin Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0R5

**BY EMAIL**

Dear Ms. Chahwan,

On behalf of the bargaining agents of the National Joint Council and the entire public service workforce, we are writing today to express our frustration, once again, with the lack of consultation regarding pandemic protocols for the public service.

We have been asking senior officials to engage through our COVID-19 working group as plans were developed to ensure appropriate paid leave provisions remained available for the individuals who need them. Instead, plans have been developed in silos, with no consultation, and without due consideration given to the impact of the changes proposed. The proposed changes represent a disruption to a system that's working well all in the name of optics.

The vast majority of public service workers have provisions in their collective agreements that offer paid leave when circumstances beyond their control prevent them from carrying out their duties. This is what led to the creation of the 699 leave code. Moving away from this approach could lead to inconsistency and inequality between groups of employees. While these clauses were never intended to support operations during a long-lasting global pandemic, they have done just that – more than 75% of workers continue to work full time and productivity has dipped only by about 5% despite the seismic changes to the work environment and society more broadly.

Nevertheless, we are prepared to work with your officials to negotiate additional provisions that better meet the needs of this unprecedented time. But we can't accept the unilateral imposition of policy interpretations such as those being prepared now – interpretations that will force some members to use sick leave to abide by public health directives and others to go without pay entirely, increasing the burden on other economic supports.

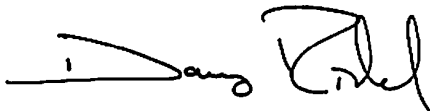
As our colleagues at PIPSC articulated so well, working parents across the country – especially women – have been forced to choose between their careers and taking care of their children. Since the start of the pandemic, participation of women in the labour force has been set back nearly three decades. Every sector of society is being challenged to come up with flexible leave policies to help working parents equitably manage caregiving demands. Rolling back the availability of paid leave is a step in the wrong direction when so many other employers are working to find ways to meet the high bar set by this government. The Government of Canada should be a leader when it comes to supporting employees rather than joining a race to the bottom in a time of crisis.

If the government insists on rolling out their unilateral changes in September as planned, you will be creating an unnecessary mental health crisis at the same time as CERB supports are wound down and parents face the stress of sending their kids back to school when plans are inconsistent across jurisdictions and constantly in flux. You also risk compounding the public health impacts of having more workers forced to work while sick and the impact on the social safety net if more workers are forced to apply for additional supports – just as case numbers start to increase in many areas in advance of a fall wave. Furthermore, the proposed changes are likely to aggravate the adverse impact on racial and ethnic groups who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

There is nothing to be gained by following this course of action. Instead, please insist that your officials work with us in a meaningful way, through the very same working group that allowed for such a seamless transition to working from home in the first place, so we can find a solution that is sustainable and fair.

We appreciate your urgent attention to this matter.

Regards,



Dany Richard, MBA, CPA, CMA, ICD.D  
Executive Council Co-Chairperson  
National Joint Council

On behalf of:

Public Service Alliance of Canada  
Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada  
Canadian Association of Professional Employees  
UCCO-SACC-CSN  
ACFO-ACAF  
Association of Justice Counsel  
PAFSO  
Research Council Employees' Association  
CUPE Local 104  
Canadian Merchant Service Guild  
IBEW Local 2228  
Federal Government Dockyard Trades & Labour Council West  
Federal Government Dockyard Trades & Labour Council East  
Canadian Federal Pilots Association  
Unifor Local 2182  
Canadian Military Colleges Faculty Association  
Federal Government Dockyard Chargehands Association  
Canadian Air Traffic Control Association  
Unifor Local 87-M