April 7, 2020

Honourable Jason Copping
Minister of Labour and Immigration
107 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue NW
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6
labour.minister@gov.ab.ca

Dear Minister Copping:

I watched, with interest, your unexpected televised announcement of changes to the Employment Standards Code late in the day yesterday, April 6, 2020.

During this time of a public health emergency due to a global pandemic and economic shock due to low oil prices, the naked truth about the economy is the real “job creators” are Alberta’s working people. Time and time again, this UCP government fails to acknowledge this truth, and last night was no exception.

Your announcement that employers will no longer be required to give 24-hour written notice of a shift change could be particularly difficult for working people with family members at home. With in-school classes cancelled and child care centres open only for essential service workers, like front-line health care staff, it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for parents to find options for child care if their shift changes at a moment’s notice.

Similarly, your allowance for employers to waive the usual two weeks’ notice period for shift changes under an overtime averaging agreement could put workers in incredibly difficult and stressful situations. During this extraordinary time, sudden shift changes on the whim of an employer should not be allowed.

If you thought of Alberta’s working people as the true job creators of this province, then you would not have made these changes to allow employers to upend schedules with no notice.

Please confirm that this measure is only in effect as long as the public health emergency remains. If that is the case, it would be a small, but important, solace.

You also announced that you will now “streamline” the approval process to modify employment standards due to the public health emergency. I ask for your commitment that, like the changes to shift-change notices, these will be temporary for only so long as a public health emergency remains. I also ask that you commit to announcing these temporary changes public on a Government of Alberta website.
These changes were unexpected and announced late in the day yesterday. We’ve heard from friends and allies in other provinces that governments of all stripes have open dialogue with labour groups, like the Alberta Federation of Labour. Changes to workplace rules, like those announced yesterday, should not be developed without consultation with the organizations that represent workers. It’s outrageous that changes of this nature were made based only on input from employers and without any consultation with workers.

During your announcement yesterday, you said, “We’re all in this together. And together, we’ll get through this.” I wholeheartedly agree, but ask that you change your focus to the working people of this province, the true job creators.

Sincerely,

Gil McGowan
President
Alberta Federation of Labour

cc: Christina Gray, MLA, Alberta NDP Critic for Labour and Immigration
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