

Vanessa Batres Toaspern. I am Control Room Operator Team Lead at Canada Line. The Control Room Operator Team Lead role is a safety critical position within the Canada Line Operation. My role requires me to manage one or more control room consoles during my shift while operating all automatic trains in revenue service, including in abnormal operating conditions. The safety aspect of the job comes from ensuring passengers, coworkers and outside agencies are safety to conduct their work or commute while I am on console.

In 2016 I was mandated to go back to work by the insurance company after being on long term disability for 15 months. I tried to navigate and advocate for myself at my worst possible time and when it was incredibly hard for me to do. I was fortunate enough to be part of a union and have the support of several shop stewards, and the business representative. With their help and perseverance, I returned to work. Returning to work and being in the building was only a small step in a journey that continues to this day for myself and other coworkers. This has brought to light and made me work hard to bring attention to and advocate for those of us who are working with a visible or invisible disability. The lack of knowledge acceptance, understanding and awareness can be very challenging and hard at times. Despite having legal protection and accommodations made to our working environment often work atmospheres can be very unforgiving. Many experience an environment where they are not only being judged by management but also by colleagues that may not understand the scope of what an individual may be going through but also facing when it comes to a either a visible or invisible disability. Many individuals face discrimination and barriers that prevent them from feeling they are fully participating at work. I would love to create an environment at my workplace but also my local (1003) but most importantly our wonderful union where there is a safe place to connect with others can relate but also support anyone faced with such challenges.

I would love to be able to increase awareness about the challenges disabled workers face returning to work or being at work. Especially when your employer but also your coworkers must accommodate you with adjusted duties, hours, or overall work. It is important that we all feel there is a place for everyone at our work environments and that there is a way to find a fit for all.

I would feel honored to be able to be part of the Human Rights and Equity committee. I take both my ability to be a union steward, OSH committee member at my work, and other committees I sit on as a great place to showcase how anyone with any type of disability can be an asset to any team.

Below is a timeline of my involvement at the union but also at Protrans BC:

2011 Protrans BC joined BCGEU

2017 became a shop steward

2018 became a local (1003) executive member at large

2019 joined the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion committee for SNC Lavalin Canada

2019 became part of the Cross component Committee are 03 - treasurer

2020 Occupational Health and safety committee member at Protans BC

2021 attend the union convention as an equity representative

2021 education committee