

February 16, 2021

Honourable Doug Ford  
Premier of Ontario  
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Honourable Christine Elliott  
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health  
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Honourable Monte McNaughton  
Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development  
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Dear Premier Ford, Ministers Elliott and

**Re: Paid Sick Leave During an Infectious Disease Emergency**

The battle to contain COVID-19 and bring the pandemic to an end has been waged on many fronts. The regulatory framework introduced by the Province, the development and dissemination of important public health guidelines and the imminent rollout of vaccines are all positive steps that have been contributing to the local efforts in the Peterborough region.

Despite governments, public health's and residents' best efforts, it has been our experience in Peterborough that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to smoulder and spread among young and precariously employed adults in our community.

These individuals, when interviewed, report their inability to stay home when sick. They describe to our nurses, going to work with symptoms of COVID-19. They explain delaying or avoiding testing in order not to jeopardize their incomes, their housing, and their food security. Often, these barriers result in cases not being identified until they become known to us as contacts. By then they have often transmitted the virus to many others.

We know that staying home when sick, getting tested, and isolating as soon as symptoms develop are key to containing this pandemic. It is clear, however, that without appropriate policies in place, behavioural recommendations alone are limited in their effectiveness. When faced with a choice between continued employment, securing food and paying rent or limiting the possibility of spreading the infection, it is not surprising that an individual's economic and security considerations take precedence.

As a result, in communities throughout Ontario, workplaces with precarious jobs and lack of paid sick leave have become hotspots for COVID-19 transmission and outbreaks. COVID-19 data also demonstrates that this burden is being borne more heavily by the racialized members of our community. Lack of access to paid sick leave is amplifying the inequities and vulnerabilities already present in our society. Current Federal programs,

although welcomed, are often inaccessible or not timely, and are of limited immediate value to the precariously employed.

For these reasons, the Board of Health for Peterborough Public Health supports the introduction of paid sick leave during an infectious disease emergency. It is requesting that the Ontario government immediately introduce paid sick leave as an essential component to the legislated emergency unpaid leave currently available as per Regulation 228/20. We further urge the government to provide funding to enable all employers to provide this important public health measure to their employees as per the principals outlined in Bill 239 (Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, 2020).

The Board of Health also supports the need to provide paid sick leave as a continuing measure once the current emergency is over. Such a measure will significantly assist in our health promotion and prevention mandate. We would urge the government to examine models to introduce and fund such a continuing initiative.

Thank you for considering our position.

Stay safe and be well.



Mayor Andy Mitchell  
Chair, Board of Health

cc: Dave Smith, MPP Peterborough-Kawartha  
David Piccini, MPP Northumberland-Peterborough South  
Laurie Scott, MPP Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock  
Peggy Sattler, MPP London West  
France G elinas, MPP Nickel Belt, Critic, Health Care  
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