



**Awareness. Inclusion.
Access. Opportunity.**

"Access to safe, affordable, and accessible housing; access to affordable and accessible transportation; access to sufficient, affordable, and nutritious food, and access to quality health care and education are basic human rights. We acknowledge that systemic barriers and discrimination can cause marginalized, racialized, immigrant, and newcomer communities to be disproportionately affected by poverty. We must work together as a community to eliminate poverty in Peel."

~ Peel Poverty Reduction
Committee

February 17, 2021

Hon. Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier:

We are writing to share with you the impact COVID-19 is having on workers, their workplaces and households and the urgent need it creates for access to paid sick and emergency leave. Peel Public Health data from August to December 2020 shows that of the 7,874 symptomatic COVID-19 cases who reported working in a community workplace setting (i.e., not work from home) while they were infectious, one quarter (1,993) reported working one or more days following the start of their symptom(s). Of these cases, 80 worked for one or more days after their positive result was reported to public health. Additionally, in Peel region alone, there have been 218 workplace outbreaks since the onset of the pandemic.

The lack of paid sick days is a health hazard as workers may fear repercussions or financial hardship if they disclose symptoms, take time to get tested or self-isolate. More action is needed to address COVID transmission in these high-risk workplaces, help flatten the curve and help ensure workers who should be self-isolating are not penalized for doing so.

The Peel Poverty Reduction Committee (PPRC), co-chaired by United Way Greater Toronto and the Region of Peel, works to combat poverty and advocate to all levels of government and systems to mitigate the effects of poverty for families and individuals in Peel. The PPRC is seeking urgent action by your government help vulnerable essential workers who are among populations at highest risk for COVID-19 exposure and transmission in their workplaces.



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To address this situation, we recommend that your government take the following 3 actions:

1. Amend the *Employment Standards Act* so that all Ontario workers have access to the legislated right and ability to stay home when sick, or caring for a household member who is sick, without the threat of loss of income or employment. Paid sick leave benefits will reduce barriers for workers who are working during the pandemic to get tested and/or self-isolate. An overarching policy must include all workers who need it, regardless of their employment and family status.
2. Increase the allocation of paid sick and emergency leave during declared emergencies and infectious disease emergencies (e.g., COVID emergency).
3. Set up a government financial support program to ensure employers are not unduly burdened by the costs of these paid days of leave.

It is critical that the Province of Ontario address these three requirements, to ensure guaranteed access to paid sick time. They provide for clear legislation protecting workers who stay home when they are sick, in what is constitutionally a provincial jurisdiction, and they ensure workers can make a timely decision to isolate with confidence that they will be compensated to prevent immediate loss of income.

Federal supports, such as the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB) and the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit (CRCB), cannot do it alone. Both the CRSB and CRCB only provide \$450 per week, which is inadequate for the high cost of living in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). Applying for these programs is also cumbersome and time consuming, with workers having to reapply to receive a second week of benefits. The CRSB is also limited to only two weeks of benefits, which may not be adequate in all cases, and the CRSB is not applicable to all categories of workers.

It is most important that action be taken soon to provide paid sick and emergency leave support to our most essential and vulnerable workers to help keep our workplaces safe and to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and variants of concern. This urgency has also been expressed by other stakeholders, including:

- Peel Regional Council
- Mayors of Brampton and Mississauga
- Mississauga City Council
- Mississauga Board of Trade
- Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) mayors and Chairs
- Ontario Big City Mayors
- Ontario Medical Association



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These are critical issues in managing the pandemic that we are all working so hard to curb. We strongly urge you to take immediate action to ensure safety through paid sick days and emergency leave. We look forward to your prompt response and action on these issues as they are, unfortunately, being experienced by many of vulnerable essential workers and their families, each day in Peel.

Kind regards,

Peel Poverty Reduction Committee

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cc:

Peel MPPs

Hon. Christine Elliot, Deputy Premier, Minister of Health

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance, President of the Treasury Board

Hon. Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development

Hon. Victor Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade

Ms. Andrea Horwath, Leader, Official Opposition, Critic, Intergovernmental Affairs

Mr. John Fraser, Critic, Seniors Affairs and Accessibility

Mr. Mike Schreiner, Leader, Green Party of Ontario

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