

Ottawa Board of Health
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa

Motion

Notice of Motion / Avis de motion

Agenda: 15
Motion 15/01

Motion on Paid Sick Leave

Moved by / propose par : Member Menard

WHEREAS, as its meeting of February 8, 2021, the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit is considering two reports from Ottawa's Medical Officer of Health on the subject of lessons learned to date from the COVID-19 pandemic titled "*Lessons Learned Working with Long-Term Care Homes During the COVID-19 Pandemic*" and "*COVID-19 Pandemic Response – Looking Ahead and Building Back Better*"; and

WHEREAS both reports underline the importance of staying home when sick in order to prevent the transmission of infectious illnesses like COVID-19, particularly as pertains to workers' ability to stay home when sick without fear of lost wages; and

WHEREAS the report titled "*COVID-19 Pandemic Response – Looking Ahead and Building Back Better*" makes both health and economic arguments in support of paid sick leave for Ontario's workforce, noting that:

- **"The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined that a healthy population and a healthy economy go hand in hand and that differences in earning power and job security directly impact individual, family and community health";**
- **"Some of Ottawa's essential workers are precariously employed, limiting their ability to stay home when ill"; and**
- **"Employees attending work while sick can have a ripple effect at the workplace, including transmitting infectious diseases, increasing their risk of injury and decreasing productivity, which can ultimately lead to increased costs to employers"; and**

WHEREAS, in addition to the economic benefits of paid sick leave to ensure workers stay home when sick to prevent the transmission of infectious illness, a

COVID-19 outbreak in a workplace can also result in reputational harm and stigma; and

WHEREAS on January 15, 2021, Ontario’s Big City Mayors put out a news release stating that “too many workers across Ontario are having to choose between going to work sick or losing income” and urging but the provincial and federal government “to implement a broader sick day program now that provides greater benefits and can be accessed by employees as quickly as possible”; and

WHEREAS, although the federal government has introduced a form of sick leave benefit, it has proven to be insufficient given that:

- **It is limited in terms of the maximum weekly amount payable to workers;**
- **It is based on full weeks of missed work rather than days of missed work, leaving workers ineligible if they miss less than a full week; and**
- **It requires workers to apply for the benefit, resulting in a wait for payment and a risk of their application being denied; and**

WHEREAS workers should be able to miss work when they are sick, regardless of the percentage of days missed in a particular week, without needing their illness to be confined to two weeks within a calendar year, and without seeing a reduction in their income for time missed due to illness; and

WHEREAS, with the exception of a relatively small number of federally regulated industries, the majority of workplaces are provincially regulated, making it foremost the jurisdiction of provinces to ensure seamless access to paid sick leave for workers; and

WHEREAS during a press briefing on January 12, 2021, both the University of Toronto’s Dr. Adalsteinn Brown and Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Ontario’s Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health, indicated that a pandemic response that relies solely on restricting individual movements — and provides no increased social supports — will not work; and

WHEREAS during that same briefing, Dr. Yaffe also noted that for some, the lack of paid sick days is a barrier to reducing transmission of the novel coronavirus ; and

WHEREAS during a January 11, 2021 press conference, Toronto’s Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Eileen de Villa also talked about the importance of paid sick leave provisions to protect the health of individual workers, workplaces, and the broader community”; and

WHEREAS, at its meeting of January 18, 2021, Toronto’s Board of Health approved recommendations calling on the Government of Ontario to:

- a. require employers in Ontario to provide no less than five paid sick days annually to workers, after three months of employment, through amendments to the *Employment Standards Act, 2000* or through a different mechanism; and**
- b. provide necessary funding, fiscal relief, and/or supports to employers so that all workers in Ontario have access to no less than 10 paid sick days annually in the event of a declared infectious disease emergency such as the COVID-19 pandemic; and**

WHEREAS despite these and other calls from public health experts and officials, the Government of Ontario has yet to announce measures that include paid sick days; and

WHEREAS the reports from Ottawa’s Medical Officer of Health clearly outline the need for paid sick leave, which should be reflected in the Ottawa Board of Health’s recommendations to the province;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Ottawa Board of Health join the Toronto Board of Health in requesting that the province:

- a. require employers in Ontario to provide no less than five paid sick days annually to workers, after three months of employment, through amendments to the *Employment Standards Act, 2000* or through a different mechanism; and**
- b. provide necessary funding, fiscal relief, and/or supports to employers so that all workers in Ontario have access to no less than 10 paid sick days annually in the event of a declared infectious disease emergency such as the COVID-19 pandemic.**

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Chair of the Board of Health include these specific recommendations in his letter to the Premier of Ontario further to recommendation 3 of the report titled “*COVID-19 Pandemic Response – Looking Ahead and Building Back Better*”.