

April 15, 2020

John McKay, MP
Scarborough Guildwood
john.mckay@parl.gc.ca



Dear MP McKay:

On behalf of more than 150 affiliated local unions and our 220,000 members, the Toronto & York Region Labour Council would like to extend our thanks to Canada's Members of Parliament. You have taken key steps to fight this momentous health crisis by providing basic protection for many working people across Canada, including often overlooked migrant workers. You worked quickly and collaboratively to do this, demonstrating what can be accomplished when leaders focus on the public good.

The labour movement can be an important partner informing decisions and communicating to the public during this health and economic crisis. Our Labour Council calls on all levels of government and all our political representatives to show utmost care for workers and communities, maintain social solidarity with the goal that no one is left behind, and recognize that Canadians start from different places. On our website, you can read our priorities for dealing with this crisis - labourcouncil.ca/priority_responses_to_covid-19.

At the federal level, there are three urgent priorities. First, banks and other financial institutions must be required to lower their credit card interest rates well below the 10.9 per cent that most are offering. At a time when banks received financial breaks through a drop in the overnight lending rate to 0.25 per cent, a spread of over 10 percentage points in interest rates seems callous at best and predatory loan-sharking at worst. This is no time to beg for lower interest rates, it is time to regulate it. It should not be left up to customers to navigate a request for a lower rate of interest - this should be provided automatically.

Second, we want to see implemented as quickly as possible the supplements approved through this weekend's Universal Consent Motion to fill gaps in the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and EI programs for seasonal workers, students, and others who have fallen through the cracks. You must quickly address those who are treated as though they quit or were fired for COVID-related reasons.

The EI system should never have been allowed to fail so many for so long. In Ontario in 2016, only 41 per cent of unemployed part-time workers were eligible for EI. At a time when there is so much precarious and gig work in our economy, our EI system has not adapted to the growth of this non-standard work. It must be redesigned to meet the needs of the actual workforce, not that of the distant past. We urge you to undertake a comprehensive review to establish an accessible and simpler EI system and, more generally, a stronger income security system.

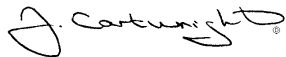
We call on you to further directly enhance the incomes of those who are not in the labour market, as well as pressure provincial governments to also do so and not to claw back federal supplements that are provided to people receiving social assistance and disability benefits.

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Third, the time has come for the federal government to implement expanded paid sick leave days for workers in federally-regulated sectors. Three paid days is insufficient to keep sick workers at home rather than at work infecting others because they must work in order to pay their bills.

The Toronto & York Region Labour Council calls on each of you to continue your leadership and ensure our society is more equal – not less – coming out of COVID-19. We will be in touch again in the near future to provide practical advice regarding next steps.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Cartwright".

John Cartwright
President

c.c. Hassan Yussuff, Canadian Labour Congress
Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
Andrew Scheer, Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada
Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada
Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party of Canada

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