



VANCOUVER and DISTRICT LABOUR COUNCIL



March 25, 2020

VIA Email: **Honorable John Horgan, MLA, Premier - premier@gov.bc.ca**
Honorable Harry Bains, MLA, Minister of Labour – lbr.minister@gov.bc.ca
Mayor Kennedy Stewart – kennedy.stewart@vancouver.ca

Greetings,

Subject: Community Health & Social Services in the Downtown Eastside

I am writing today on behalf of the Vancouver and District Labour Council, representing approximately 60,000 unionized workers in the Vancouver area. We have been convening meetings of our affiliates representing front-line workers in Community Social Services and Community Health in the Downtown Eastside of the City of Vancouver (DTES).

The DTES has long been one of the poorest areas in the country. Among its residents are thousands of working poor and unemployed people, many of whom are homeless or have precarious housing. The area has been especially hard-hit by the opioid and housing crises in recent years.

The COVID-19 pandemic puts the residents of the DTES at enhanced risk due to crowding, lack of proper housing and opportunities to effectively self-isolate, and a shortage of sanitation facilities.

Every day, Community Health and Community Social Service workers are reporting to their jobs and continuing to serve the DTES community to the best of their abilities. They know that this is a crucial time, and these services can make all the difference.

But these workers need urgent action by government in order to remain safe and healthy so that they can continue to perform this critical work.

We are calling on the provincial government and city hall to cooperate in ensuring the following for DTES workers:

- Labour representation on the DTES Task Force, and any other body established by government to address the pandemic;

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- Clear guidelines indicating which services are to remain open during this crisis, and how to ensure social distancing in practice;
- Provision of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment to all front-line workers, with necessary training and guidelines for its use, and input from unions in the decision-making process for what PPE is appropriate;
- Allocation of all necessary additional resources to provide services to those in need;
- Presumptive WCB coverage for front-line workers who contract COVID-19;
- Ensuring the safe and consistent supply of food to services in the DTES;
- Ensure additional stock of sanitizing cleaning supplies are available, and additional working hours are funded to complete necessary cleaning;
- Support for workers' mental health concerns in light of the increased stress and trauma that the COVID-19 pandemic has added to this already difficult and often dangerous work.

The conditions in the DTES present the danger of a widespread public health catastrophe for its residents. Community Health and Community Social Service workers play an indispensable role in avoiding that danger and keeping people safe. Let's all step up and keep them safe too.

We ask you to do everything you can to ensure the above requests are met for the safety of DTES workers and residents. Please notify us as soon as possible as to the actions being taken.

Yours truly,



Stephen von Sychowski
President, VDLC

cc: VDLC Executive
Honorable Harry Bains, Minister of Labour - lbr.minister@gov.bc.ca
Mayor Kennedy Stewart - kennedy.stewart@vancouver.ca