

Letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Pandemic Pay and Worker's Needs

Oct 28, 2020

SENT BY EMAIL

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister,

As you may be aware, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Locals 175 & 633 represent more than 70,000 workers in many sectors of the economy across Ontario. The vast majority of our Membership has worked on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic in grocery and pharmacy retail, industrial meat processing facilities, and healthcare workplaces like long-term care and retirement homes: working to keep all of us healthy, fed and well. As you can imagine, conditions in these settings have been difficult and our Members are continuing to deal with many of the same dangers and frustrations in the workplace today as we soar into the second wave of the pandemic.

These workers need support: support we're calling on the Government of Canada and you, the Prime Minister, to provide.

We're asking the government to take the following, immediate actions:

- Call on employers to resume and make permanent pandemic pay increases;
- Implement an increase to the federal minimum wage to make it a living wage;
- Make long-term care part of the public healthcare system;
- Make pharmacare part of the public healthcare system;
- Legislate a federal pandemic pay premium that has to be paid when a public health emergency is declared;
- Make the COVID-19 related supports offered to workers through EI permanent.

At the beginning of the pandemic, our Union called on the employers we deal with to recognize the hard work and difficult circumstances our Members were under.

Our Members in grocery stores were being spit on, yelled at, and had to clean up discarded PPE.

Our Members in factories were working shoulder to shoulder, striving to keep up with increased demand for product.

Our Members in healthcare – already struggling to provide care in a broken system – were watching the residents in their care get sick and die, while often becoming sick themselves.

Many of the employers recognized those issues and stepped up to provide relief, increase workplace safety and, importantly, provide a wage increase. Your government also provided a temporary increase to healthcare workers, which was much appreciated.

Unfortunately, today almost all of those temporary wage increases have stopped for workers. This is despite the fact that the pandemic continues and the threat to workers remains the same today as in March. Those wage increases had a dramatic effect for the workers in those sectors, giving them the motivation to continue to come to work and offer their services in these difficult times. With the removal of that pay, frustration, burnout and low morale are on the rise.

We know the public supports these initiatives. Our Union asked for support from Ontarians across the province, asking people to sign their name to this statement:

"I support making the pandemic pay permanent for all employees working to keep Canadians fed, healthy, and cared for by doing essential work in our health care, industrial food, product packaging, meat and poultry processing, transportation, retail grocery, and pharmacy sectors."

In a matter of months, we received 8,575 signatures supporting that statement. The people of this province value the work being performed by workers in those sectors and are calling on you, Premier, and all our elected officials and employers to step up and do the right thing to keep people working.

We are focused on trying to work with all parties at this time to get through this crisis, to maintain service and protect people as much as possible. We believe that if your government acts on the points we've outlined, this country and its workers will prosper and have the best outcome to get through this global crisis. We are prepared to work with you, and any party, to find solutions together to achieve those goals.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Shawn Haggerty
President
UFCW Local 175

cc: Hon. Chrystia Freeland
Hon. Carla Qualtrough
Hon. Patty Hajdu
Hon. Filomena Tassi
Pres. Paul Meinema
Jagmeet Singh
Erin O'Toole