



**Submission by the
UFCW Canada Ontario Provincial Council
to the Ontario Ministry of Finance**

**Recommendations relating
to the Fall 2020 Budget**

**SUBMISSION BY THE UFCW CANADA ONTARIO PROVINCIAL COUNCIL TO THE ONTARIO
MINISTRY OF FINANCE — RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE FALL 2020 BUDGET**

UFCW Canada Ontario Provincial Council represents over 130,000 union members from eight local unions (Locals 102, 175, 232, 333, 387W, 633, 1006A and 12R24) in most sectors of the economy in the province of Ontario. Including the Ontario membership, UFCW Canada (United Food and Commercial Workers Union) represents more than 250,000 members from coast-to-coast.

The majority of our members have been on the frontlines during this pandemic. They have been keeping their Ontario neighbours fed, healthy and well, and we are very proud of the exceptional work they have done in difficult and stressful circumstances. We also represent many workers who have been put out of work due to the ongoing pandemic; particularly in the hospitality, tourism and service sectors who also deserve recognition and assistance at this time.

We respectfully want to bring to your attention the impact of COVID-19 on our members who play a key role in the operation and delivery of services in Ontario. Our very diverse membership operate in areas where they are continually exposed to the public in retail locations; or work in other environments that have increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 such as healthcare settings like homecare, long-term care and retirement homes; as well as at high risk environments such as industrial meat processing facilities. Many of our members have become ill from the pandemic and, very sadly, we have also had deaths from the virus.

As the pandemic continues, UFCW believes that it is vital for the government to take concrete action to protect the health and economic security of workers and the public, restore consumer confidence, and create retraining programs and opportunities for workers to transition into the post-pandemic economy.

The position of UFCW Canada Ontario Provincial Council is that the Ontario Government should support and protect workers by implementing the following measures as part of the fall budget:

- Ensure widespread and easy access to rapid, reliable, and publicly-delivered coronavirus testing. Efficient and timely contact-tracing must be available in Ontario to help establish and implement government-required safety protocols for workers.
- Ensure a long-lasting recovery is not derailed by additional waves of COVID-19. This includes mandatory personal protective equipment for workers and the public at restaurants, healthcare, hotels, retail, industrial sites and airports as needed (including masks); and enhanced infection controls (including physical distancing and frequent sanitation/cleaning protocols).
- Ensure presumptive application of WSIB coverage for those exposed to COVID-19 at work. This will ensure workers won't lose income if they contract COVID-19 at work and can fully recover before they return.

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- Provide ten permanent paid sick days to all workers, so no worker has to choose between their health and their livelihoods. This measure will help protect public health, as workers will be less likely to come in sick, and transmit COVID-19 to co-workers and customers. Currently, Ontario workers have zero paid sick days under employment standards – workers don't only get sick during pandemics.
- Substantially increase the minimum wage to that of a living wage, with indexing following inflation on a go forward basis to ensure the wage rates maintain at living wage status.
- Implement a “pandemic pay premium” for workers in the current, and any future period in which public health organizations declare a public health emergency and workers continue to report to work.
- Implement an across the board wage increase for all workers in healthcare, particularly in long-term care, retirement and homecare settings.
- Implement a four-hour minimum direct care standard for residents in long-term care.
- Ensure staff recruitment and retention by incentivizing new hires to the industry by providing good employment conditions including full-time work and appropriate broad compensation.
- Explore funding for tourism promotion programs to attract consumers to Ontario’s hospitality and tourism sectors. A one-time provincial tax credit for residents who visit provincial hotels and restaurants could be an incentive that helps revive Ontario’s struggling tourism sector.
- Stop the waste of taxpayers’ money on legal fees and penalties in breaking binding contracts.
- Protect the hugely successful deposit return programs for wine, beer and liquor containers.
- Create programs to help Ontario workers, impacted by the pandemic, to re-enter the economy. As worker training experts, unions are best suited to helping workers retrain to find meaningful employment. For example, our unions have the ability and capacity to retrain out of work members at no cost to fill thousands of jobs available in the security and service sectors. To meet the incredible demand for workers in those sectors, the government must modernize the licensing process.

BACKGROUND

UFCW represents tens of thousands of members throughout the province of Ontario in most workplace sectors. All of these sectors have been impacted by COVID-19, often in different ways.

TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Thousands of workers have experienced widespread layoffs and reductions in hours due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hotel Sector: 80 to 90% of our members have been laid off as hotel stays collapsed, resulting in many hotels temporarily closing.

Restaurant Sector: 65% of our members have been laid off as locations shut down or pivoted to takeout and delivery services.

In UFCW Canada Locals 102 and Local 333's joint submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, they recommended that the government should consider giving a tax credit to patrons of hotels and restaurants as a means of recovery for the hospitality sector.

The government might consider a one-time tax credit using an arbitrary number of \$500, that consumers could receive for spending up to \$500 in hotels and restaurants. This could be viewed as an incentive to companies and workers in the sector who are still struggling after reopening, and to Ontarians who have lost income due to the pandemic.

This is similar to the British government's "Eat Out to Help Out" campaign which was part of a £30bn mini-Budget package designed to "protect, support and create jobs." In addition, other economy-aiding measures included slashed value-added tax (VAT) for businesses in the hospitality and tourism industry, and a 'Kickstart' jobs scheme for young people and bonuses for furloughed workers back at work. According to Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said, "the UK Government's Eat Out to Help Out scheme has been a roaring success, helping protect 1.8 million jobs in the hospitality sector."

We believe that with proper management a similar and expanded program could be instituted that would stimulate the sector.

Airport Hospitality Sector: 90% of members working in food services at Toronto's Pearson and Billy Bishop airports have been laid off.

Car Rental Sector: Business has dropped by 80 to 90%. Employers are currently renting 100 vehicles a week – compared to the 900 rentals per day prior to the pandemic.

Security Sector: With the Covid-19 pandemic we have witnessed an unprecedented growth in the security guard industry in all sectors of the economy including the hospitality sector. With a new normal and the possibility of a second wave the need for guards will continue. However, during the pandemic it is impossible to take the required test to become a security guard as Drive Test Centres where one has to take a pencil and paper test have been closed. UFCW Canada Locals have the ability and capacity to retrain members at no cost to fill thousands of jobs available in the security sector.

Despite our best efforts the government has resisted our pleas to modernize the licensing process. We would appreciate the opportunity to enter into discussion with the government to assist in the training and modernization of the licensing process.

RETAIL

The Beer Store:

Our Local, UFCW 12R24, warned the government one-and-a-half years ago that its scheme to expand beer sales to corner stores could cost 7,000 jobs. We warned the government these job losses would hit smaller communities hard across Ontario. We warned that corner store clerks are not trained to sell alcohol safely and would be paid minimum wage to do so, putting community safety at risk. We did not receive a response.

After a cordial chat at a public luncheon almost a year ago, our Local Union asked Finance Minister Rod Phillips for a formal meeting to discuss the economic impact of putting 7,000 good-paying jobs at risk just to sell beer in corner stores. He agreed to the meeting, but we never met because his office refused to schedule it. In that time, Minister Phillips and several other ministers have met with the Ontario Convenience Stores Association several times, which has pressured the government relentlessly to allow corner stores to sell alcohol.

Over the past seven months, our Local along with our employer, The Beer Store, worked together to help raise \$2.3 million through community bottle drives to help hospitals, food banks, clinics and local charities to help Ontarians cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. But now the Ford government is proposing regulations to sabotage the deposit return programs that helped raise these funds by making bottle/can deposits optional. This will force beer, wine and liquor producers to pay for Blue Box programs that fall far short of the re-use and recycling success of deposit return programs.

Why would the government purposely sabotage a successful program that creates jobs, encourages a circular economy and reduces environmental harm?

Grocery and Pharmacy Retail:

UFCW Locals 175 & 633 and UFCW Local 1006A represent the majority of unionized retail grocery and pharmacy workers across Ontario. Our membership has worked diligently and constantly throughout the pandemic and has had to face very difficult circumstances throughout. From early March, the environment in retail has shifted considerably.

In the span of a few short months our members and the public had to adapt to the new realities brought by COVID-19 and learned to adapt to new methods and concepts. This included customer limits, masking, plexiglass barriers, social distancing and more.

While the vast majority of the public has been prepared to follow the safety measures and limits, there continues to be an unacceptable level of inappropriate actions being taken in the stores.

Our members have been yelled at, grabbed, forced to clean up soiled personal protective equipment and explain bylaw requirements to unwilling people. Our pharmacy members may now also work in locations where the public come to be tested for COVID-19. The threat of the contracting the virus remains an ever-present concern, causing emotional stress on our membership.

Indeed, many of our members in retail setting have been infected with COVID-19, sadly including the death of a young woman. Workers in this sector need to feel supported and that can and should come from both the employer and the government.

INDUSTRIAL

Locals 175 & 633 and Local 1006A represent thousands of workers in industrial workplaces in Ontario. This includes industrial meat processing facilities. Like other settings that have a number of people in close proximity, these facilities have been challenged with operating given the COVID-19 pandemic. While our facilities in Ontario have avoid so far mass outbreaks as seen in Alberta and Quebec, we have experienced workers becoming infected and, most regrettably, have had one member who worked in the sector pass away.

HEALTHCARE

Local 175 represents many healthcare workers across Ontario, particularly in long-term care homes, retirement homes, providing home care, public health services, addiction treatment and many other services. Conditions across the sector have been difficult for some time, especially in elder care such as long-term care and retirement homes.

Before the pandemic, Local 175 had long advocated and called for significant reforms in the sector. For decades, staffing has been an intense concern in the industry, with the Local highlighting the negative impact of low compensation packages and hours for workers. Morale of these workers has been low for years, with burnout leading to an exodus of workers from the sectors, especially for those who provide direct care to elders.

Once the pandemic hit, the worst-case scenario clearly became a reality, with mass outbreaks of COVID-19 in long-term care and retirement homes. This led to tremendous negative outcomes, many of which can be attributed directly to the subpar employment conditions workers have been experiencing.

This entire sector needs significant reform in order to avoid repeats of the bad outcomes and to provide for the best possible conditions for resident and workers in the sector. This was made clear by the conclusions released from the long-term care staffing study released by the government on July 30th of this year, that significant reforms are required to provide for the best system.

PANDEMIC PAY PROGRAMS

Early in the pandemic, many employers provided a pay increase that was successful in making the workers feel that their efforts were important and recognized. This immediately improved morale and staff retention and was widely praised in the media. In most cases, these same Employers enjoyed record breaking profits and their businesses surged due to the high demand from the public.

Locals 175 & 633 ran a campaign which collected over 8,500 signatures in a matter of months, supporting 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.”

Unfortunately, most of these same Employers have now ended their pay programs for employees. This is despite the fact that the conditions have not changed in meaningful ways across workplace sectors. Increases precautions are still in use, PPE is still required and there is no available vaccine to reduce the threat of the COVID-1 virus. The government has an opportunity to step in where the Employers have now failed, to implement reasonable legislation to ensure that workers can continue to go to work safely and with confidence.

CONCLUSION

As Ontario continues to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital for the government to take concrete steps to protect the health and economic security of workers and the public. Decision-makers must take into account the reality that it may take years for these sectors to return to their pre-pandemic levels; including profit, customer and employment levels.

UFCW Canada Ontario Provincial Council believes implementing our recommendations will help protect the health and safety of workers and the public, revive the economy by restoring consumer confidence, and help support a long-lasting recovery.

Respectfully Submitted by,

UFCW Canada Ontario Provincial Council
October 16, 2020