

2006 UPDATE on **Bargaining**

For the latest updates call our hotline at : (604) 473-5444 (Lower Mainland) or 1-800-335-5665 (toll-free)

February 27, 2006

The \$1 Billion Question

In preparation for the 2006 negotiations, our unions consulted extensively with members to identify our issues and demands for a new collective agreement. Members said strongly that you wanted your bargaining committee to negotiate fair wages, safe workplaces, improve benefits, improve work-life balance and provide job security.

Thus far in bargaining, the employers' representatives, through the Community Social Services Employers' Association (CSEAA), have refused to adequately address our issues. And, they've proposed to eliminate the employment security provisions that we won in the last round of negotiations.

Perhaps employers believe our members can be convinced to accept an inferior collective agreement, in exchange for the government's bonus offer to public sector unions who settle agreements by March 31, 2006.

The \$1 billion 'incentive' being dangled could mean upwards of \$3000 per full-time worker. Some employers have insensitively characterized this money as the "plasma-TV" bonus. Others are suggesting that unions will not be doing their job for members if settlements aren't in place by March 31.

We are working hard to achieve a fair agreement by March 31 and the bonus payout. But doing our job also means doing all we can to ensure you have a strong collective agreement that protects your rights, and improves your wages and working conditions. And that can take time, particularly if the employers do not seem to be equally motivated to settle fairly and quickly.

Community social services workers are the lowest paid public sector workers. Bonus money would certainly help pay your rent and put food on your family's table. But the March 31 deadline imposed by government is a pressure tactic. We have told the employers

that you have given us a mandate to improve your working conditions and to protect your jobs. Those are the priorities. A one-time bonus means little if your job is contracted out in six months to someone else.

In 2001, the Campbell government passed Bill 29 and broke your legal contract. They threatened to contract out your work. In the 2004 round of collective bargaining, the government forced unions to accept concessions on our hard-won collective agreement rights and compensation in return for saving members' jobs.

The bonus does not come close to covering the losses you've suffered since then. The average community social services worker has paid nearly \$1,200 for their own MSP premiums since April 2004. A full-time Residence Worker hired after April 2004 gets just \$13.87 an hour, receiving almost \$6,000 less than if they had been paid at the previous rate of \$16.83 an hour. The cost of living increase over the past two years has further eroded your take home pay.

The bonus being offered is for each full-time equivalent (FTE). It's pro-rated for part-time and casual workers. The money is subject to the usual deductions, which will greatly reduce the take home amount. The bonus has other strings attached. For example, members must ratify a four year collective agreement by the end of March.

The Union Bargaining Association (UBA) has told CSSEA and the employers that the collective agreement forced on us in 2004 needs substantial changes.

CSSEA says, "this round of bargaining is all about money." It's really about respect for frontline community social services workers and the important work we do. We can't and won't settle for a one-time signing bonus at the expense of a fair collective agreement that will protect our jobs.

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