



Bargaining Bulletin

HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

THE HEART OF HEALTH CARE

Tentative agreement reached for Community Social Services workers

HEU's provincial executive, provincial bargaining committee to review tentative settlement

NEARLY 15,000 community social services workers reached a tentative agreement with their employers early this morning that will help to restore stability and continuity of service for B.C.'s most vulnerable citizens.

The tentative two-year agreement expires March 31, 2006.

The terms of the tentative contract will now be reviewed by HEU's provincial bargaining committee and provincial executive. And further details will not be released to the public until after the members of the 13 unions that belong to the union bargaining association have voted on it.

"We have a tentative agreement that is critical to safeguarding the long-standing relationships of trust, care and friendship between vulnerable clients such as adults and children with physical and developmental challenges and their caregivers,"

said Chris Anderson, spokesperson for the Union Bargaining Association.

"These relationships have been threatened for the past two years since the Campbell Liberals passed legislation allowing the government to shift services to the lowest bidder, with no regards for the impact on workers and clients who would ultimately pay the price.

"While we can't stop the government from continuing down this reckless path, with this tentative agreement we can maintain service for clients and protect jobs at the same time."

Continuity of service was a priority for community social services workers going into this round of bargaining. "Our members told us any deal had to protect jobs and provide for continuity of service for their clients. It was the last big item on the table," Anderson said.

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The parties have agreed to submit any outstanding non-monetary issues to a mediator for binding recommendations.

Anderson described the complex set of bargaining involving 13 unions and 217 employers as "gruelling." Bargaining in the latter stages took place amidst high-level resignations and firings, criminal investigations, and allegations of fraud and fudged contracts within the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

"We knew this would be a tough set of negotiations even before we got to the bargaining table last fall," Anderson said. "The sector was already in turmoil as a result of Bill 29 which allowed the government to rip up existing legal contracts and strip workers of their hard-won rights and provisions, including levels of service delivery.

"Add to that a confusing and ill-thought plan to transfer services to an independent authority, causing needless anxiety and fear among clients and workers. And to top it off, \$100 million in cuts to funding for services, with plans to cut an additional \$70 million."

Anderson said the employers' bargaining representative, the Community Social Services Employers' Association

(CSSEA), opened negotiations with an initial demand to claw back \$70 million from the workers. "We knew going into these negotiations that we would be forced to look at the collective agreement for ways to make up the shortfall resulting from the government's huge cuts in funding to the sector.

"With the support and solidarity of our members, who were under threat of a lock-out, we were able to achieve an agreement that protects jobs and ensures stability for both workers and clients. However, this agreement came at a price."

Community social services workers provide a wide range of services including assistance to people with physical or developmental disabilities such as Down Syndrome or autism, counselling, support and guidance to teenagers, children and parents, assistance to immigrant families, crisis centres and suicide prevention, help for women and their children fleeing abusive homes, and sexual assault response and advocacy.

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