



Bargaining Bulletin

HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

THE HEART OF HEALTH CARE

Unions table wage position

Health care unions bargaining a new contract for 38,000 hospital and long-term care workers have tabled an opening position on wages Tuesday that is designed to recover lost ground.

The Facilities Bargaining Association is looking to restore wages to pre-Bill 37 levels and negotiate a signing bonus and regular wage increases over a three-year contract.

Last week, the unions tabled proposals on job-specific wage adjustments that addressed uncompetitive wage rates and increased training and responsibilities.

The FBA has now tabled proposals covering each of five themes identified on the first day of bargaining, January 26: recovering lost ground; recognizing diverse skills and changing roles; workload overload; stability for stronger public health care; and other general improvements to the contract.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says that health care workers took the brunt of government restraint in the public sector.

“The B.C. government has banked hundreds of millions of dollars taken from our members’ pay cheques through wage cuts,” says Darcy.

“In human terms, that’s forced members to work more than one job, give up their homes, defer higher education for their children and take on more overtime.

“In our workplaces, it’s led to a crisis in staff morale. Many skilled, experienced workers are actively looking for work outside health care,” adds Darcy.

“Now with a robust economy and a growing surplus, it’s time for a fair deal for health care workers that recognizes this inequity – and addresses very real recruitment and retention issues.”

In concrete terms, the FBA’s position tabled yesterday includes reversing the Bill 37 wage cuts of 11 per cent and restoring the 36-hour work week.

The FBA is also proposing a significant signing bonus funded from the \$1 billion set aside from the current budgetary surplus plus additional regular wage increases of 3.5 per cent annually over a three-year contract.

The unions also tabled specific improvements to the contract dealing with meal allowances, shift differentials, on-call pay, transportation allowances, overtime, and health and welfare benefits.

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The BC Health Services Division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees



Darcy says she does not expect a comprehensive response from health employers until next week.

“These will be difficult talks given the restrictive nature of government’s negotiating framework,” says Darcy.

“The finance minister has set aside \$4.7 billion for the entire public sector – more than 300,000 workers – over the next four years.

“That sounds like a lot of money but it will barely cover inflationary increases to current wages leaving little room to address other pressing issues.

“With our entire package now on the table, I expect negotiations will now become more difficult and complex.”

On Thursday, front-line union members will make presentations at the bargaining table to underscore the FBA’s proposals on diverse skills and changing roles.

Other issues under discussion include an employer proposal for a pilot trades apprenticeship program in health care.