



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Government scheme to centralize health services may lead to more privatization and layoffs

Plans hatched in secret despite government's obligation to share information with health unions in wake of Supreme Court of Canada decision on Bill 29

The B.C. government and its six health authorities today announced a new bureaucracy whose sweeping mandate includes centralizing a number of health services and may prompt a new wave of privatization.

But even though these plans have been in the works for the last eight months, government representatives chose not to disclose them to health unions until this week, despite repeated requests for the information during talks on the implementation of last June's Supreme Court of Canada decision on Bill 29.

The failure of the B.C. government to consult with health unions on issues that affect their members' collective bargaining rights was central to the ruling which struck down key sections of the 2002 law.

Bill 29 rewrote health care collective agreements and resulted in the layoff of thousands of workers – mostly women – to make way for privatization.

In its decision, the Court established collective bargaining as a right protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. As a result of this decision, there is an obligation by government to engage in meaningful consultations and good faith negotiations.

Hospital Employees' Union secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says the secrecy leading up to today's announcement shows that the B.C. government has learned little from the Court – or from five years of failed privatization experiments.

“This government has callously disregarded the *Charter* rights of workers whose livelihood could be put at risk as a result of today's announcement,” says Darcy. “Today's action will cause uncertainty for hundreds of workers at a time when recruitment and retention in the health care sector is a major problem.

“It also shows a profound lack of respect for our ongoing efforts to reach a solution with government on the implementation of the court's Bill 29 decision.”

The new Health Authority Shared Services organization – run by the health ministry and B.C.'s six health authorities – is targeting payroll, information technology, purchasing and other services for centralization and possible privatization. The result could be the transfer of confidential employee information to private corporations. Approximately 1350 HEU members work in these areas.

Darcy is the spokesperson for the multi-union Facilities Bargaining Association which has been in talks with government on the implementation of the Bill 29 ruling since early October.

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Contact: Mike Old, HEU communications director
604-828-6771 (cell)

