

CSS bargaining conference sets priorities for upcoming contract talks

As momentum builds around upcoming negotiations in the public sector, more than 30 delegates to HEU's community social services bargaining conference met in Victoria to discuss their priority issues, adopt bargaining demands, and elect a bargaining committee.



Over the two-day conference April 23 and 24, members also took time to share stories about the challenges they face on the job, and talk about the value of their work. As many expressed, CSS workers are often the only “family” clients have. And they talked about how their work supports people to participate as full citizens in society, and live a full community life.

However, in a seriously under-resourced system, workers are bearing the brunt of underfunding and understaffing. As one delegate put it, “we’re here to try and repair a broken system.”

In her opening address, HEU's secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside emphasized the impact of cutbacks over the past 16 years on members and clients.

“No one who’s paying attention can argue that the working conditions in this sector are anything other than unacceptable,” she said. “And yet, the expectations of members to perform superhuman tasks day after day is incredibly high.”

Members were clear about their top bargaining priorities: Restoration of full sick leave, increased wages, successorship and portability, improved health and welfare benefits, and stronger health and safety protections.

HEU is one of ten unions represented in the Community Social Services Bargaining Association (CSSBA). Bargaining demands approved at the conference will be sent to the CSSBA on behalf of HEU's 1,500 community social services members.

A new bargaining team was elected during the conference, to represent HEU at the multi-union table: Cheryl McLachlan of VACL/VCRS Local and David Huespe from WHR

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Lower Mainland Local. Three alternates were also chosen: Rosa Smith (VAL/VCRS Local), Andrew Dol (Malaspina/Mid-Island Local) and Teresa McCoy (South Vancouver Island Local).



During the conference, delegates heard from HEU president Victor Elkins and HEU financial secretary Donisa Bernardo.

HEU Provincial Executive members Island regional vice-president Bill McMullan, Vancouver Coastal regional vice-president Louella Vincent, and trustee Ken Bennett, who are all community social services members, were active participants throughout the conference proceedings.

In addition, Fraser regional vice-president Maria Rodriguez and North regional vice-president Mike Cartwright were on hand to meet delegates and learn more about the issues they are facing on the job.

Other highlights included roundtable discussions with four MLAs, who took time from their schedules to hear directly from members about the value of their work and the issues they face.

Negotiations with the Community Social Services Employers' Association (CSSEA) are set to begin on May 15.

Members are encouraged to talk to delegates from their locals who attended the conference, and to share information with others at their work sites.

If you would like to receive CSS bargaining updates directly, please send your name and contact info to members@heu.org or text 604-785-5324.

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