



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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November 8, 2018

Repeal of discriminatory health labour laws to help restore fairness, stability to health care, says HEU

Bill 29 led to the firing of thousands of health care workers and mass privatization of health care services

The 49,000-member Hospital Employees' Union is welcoming the B.C. government's move to repeal Gordon Campbell-era laws that stripped health care workers' collective agreements of job security provisions and excluded them from the full protection of provincial labour laws.

As a result, thousands of health care workers – mostly women – were fired as health authorities contracted out hospital cleaning, food services, laundry and other support services.

Thousands more were laid off by nursing home operators who subcontracted care and support staff – and flipped those contracts – in a bid to keep wages low and bust union collective agreements.

“Fragmentation of health care delivery, the disruption of care relationships, and more precarious and lower paid work is the direct result of these mean-spirited laws,” says HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside.

“Repealing these laws is a giant step towards restoring justice and fairness for health care workers and repairing the damage that's been done to health care delivery.”

Bill 29 – the Health and Social Services Delivery Improvement Act – was rammed through the legislature, without notice, one weekend in January 2002, despite a pre-election promise by former premier Gordon Campbell that he would not tear up health care contracts.

Similar legislation adopted in 2003, the *Health Sector Partnerships Agreement Act (Bill 94)*, gave care home operators and their subcontractors the ability to sidestep key provisions of the labour code, and avoid restrictions on their ability to contract out care and support services.

In 2007, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the provisions of *Bill 29*, including those that nullified job security protections against contracting out were unconstitutional, and in doing so established collective bargaining as a charter-protected right for all workers.

By that time, nearly 10,000 workers had been fired as a result of the law. The vast majority of those impacted were women. And racialized women were disproportionately affected by the legislation.

In 2008, the B.C. government rescinded provisions of *Bill 29* and *Bill 94* that had been ruled unconstitutional. But both laws continued to exclude health care workers from key provisions of the *B.C. Labour Relations Code*, including successor rights and common employer declarations.

Bill 47 – the Health Sector Statutes Repeal Act – repeals both bills, effective early next year, and will be implemented through regulation after consultation with sector stakeholders.

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For more information, contact HEU communications officer Sara Rozell, 604-209-3861.