



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWSLETTER

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OIPC orders release of VIHA/Compass contracts to HEU

Full commercial and financial disclosure of outsourcing agreements should be “proactive” and “routine”

On November 25, B.C.'s Office of the Information and Privacy Commission (OIPC) issued an order to release – in full – two more commercial contracts between a public body and a private corporation.

The province's privacy watchdog found that the Hospital Employees' Union could receive unredacted copies of the food services and cleaning agreements between the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) and Compass Canada.

HEU had filed requests for the contracts in 2007 under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA)*. VIHA – which has posted limited versions of the contracts on its website – initially rejected full disclosure of the contracts, but changed course and was prepared to provide complete agreements to the union.

At that point, Compass objected and as a result, only redacted documents, that is, documents where words or sections are blocked out, were released.

HEU then requested that the OIPC review the decision to withhold information contained in these contracts.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says that this ruling strengthens the OIPC's precedent-setting order of August 16, 2010 which required the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (VCHA) to release its contracts with Compass, Sodexo and K-Bro Linen Systems to the union.

“Openness and transparency is essential when it comes to establishing a high standard of accountability to the public,” Darcy says. “This OIPC ruling moves B.C. closer to that goal.”

B.C.'s Information and Privacy Commissioner Elizabeth Denham also indicated that the decision continues a trend toward the release of contract details between public bodies and outside providers.

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“These decisions demonstrate that public agencies should consider the routine release of these types of outsourcing contracts. Proactively releasing these contracts would save everyone considerable time, money and paperwork,” she stated in a November 25 OIPC news release.

In her recent report *It's About Time: Report Card on the Timeliness of Government Access to Information Responses*, Denham noted that routine release and proactive disclosure “would also promote trust and confidence in government.”

Compass Group and/or the health authority have 30 days to request a judicial review of the OIPC order.

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