



Campaign to save hospital laundry gaining public and political support

On May 26, HEU financial secretary Donisa Bernardo, accompanied by nearly 30 HEU members and supporters, addressed the Interior Health Authority's board of directors to urge them to halt plans to privatize hospital laundry services in 11 communities throughout the region.

Bernardo spoke about the efficiency of the current in-house laundry system and the modest investment it would take to preserve this critical public health service and save 175 family-supporting jobs in the Interior.

She also emphasized the environmental concerns of transport trucks hauling thousands of pounds of hospital laundry to the Lower Mainland or Alberta, where the private contract bidders are located.

And Bernardo praised local politicians for joining in the fight to save hospital laundry.

"Municipal leaders across the region are also speaking out against the possible privatization and loss of laundry jobs in their communities," said Bernardo, "with councils in Nelson, Kamloops, Vernon, 100 Mile House, Williams Lake and the Cariboo Regional District adopting resolutions to this effect."

Joining Bernardo at the presentation were HEU laundry workers Jessica Guthrie of Kelowna General Hospital and Rhonda Studer of Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops.

Studer spoke compellingly about the passion laundry workers have for their jobs and the value of keeping the service in-house.

"What makes in-house laundry so critical to patient care comes from our ability to meet local needs in a timely and efficient way, and to rise to the occasion when the unexpected happens," said Studer. "For example, we are able to provide patients, who are allergic to detergent, with special rinses to keep them safe."

"And when patients with MRSA or C-diff are admitted to hospital, our nurses are able to send porters down to the laundry at any time throughout the day to get the linens they need for isolations. And this, I can tell you, happens a lot."

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Guthrie talked about the key role laundry workers play on the health care team and shared that many workers, like herself, risk tremendous financial hardship if they lose their jobs.

“We come in every day and work as hard as we can to make sure that the patients of the Interior are provided with clean, sterile linen,” said Guthrie. “Without that, there would be no hospital admissions, no surgeries, but there would certainly be more infections.

“These jobs support our families, as well as our communities. Our paycheques support local businesses and help them thrive. Many of us, including myself, donate to local charities which helps our communities thrive.”

On May 14, a delegation of HEU laundry workers and supporters delivered a petition with more than 12,400 signatures on it to the B.C. Legislature. It was tabled by NDP MLA Michelle Mungall.

With a groundswell of public support and media attention, HEU’s fightback campaign will hit the streets with upcoming rallies in Kamloops (June 16), Kelowna (June 18) and Nelson (June 20).

And the union is continuing to urge city councils in other impacted communities, including Kelowna and Penticton, to also support a motion to keep laundry services in-house.

For more information, visit <<https://www.facebook.com/KeepLaundryPublic>>.

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