



B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members

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Oct 3, 2019

To whom it may concern:

Re: Domestic and Sexual Violence Leave

The BC Federation of Retired Union Members – BC FORUM – represents thousands of retired and active workers from unions affiliated to the BC Federation of Labour. We are dedicated to representing the well-being of members, their families and their spouses. Our members live in all parts of this province.

All our members were or are currently involved in the trade union movement. When we were working, many of us tried to assist members who were facing domestic and sexual violence.

For some of our members, domestic and sexual violence was something no one talked about. We often worked with women, who we believed were facing violence but there were so many taboos about raising this issue.

Even if we were able to have a discussion with a co-worker facing domestic and sexual violence there was little we could do. We could suggest they go to counselling and talk to them about women's shelters (if there were women's shelters where they lived). We could try to convince them to take sick leave, but we met resistance as people felt they were being untruthful if they booked off sick in these circumstances. There was not much more we could do.

We saw people facing domestic and sexual violence at work and saw how much they struggled at work. Their work suffered because they had so much on their mind. On other occasions they needed time off just to heal, other times it was to attend counselling or go to legal appointments. They could not afford to take unpaid leave and there was no avenue for them to take paid leave. It felt to us that they were being punished for experiencing violence.

It is because of the real lived experiences of BC FORUM members that our organization is calling for at least 10 days of paid leave for people facing domestic and sexual violence.

BC FORUM is strongly supporting potential changes to the BC Employment Standards Act to ensure that workers facing domestic and sexual violence have at least 10 days of paid leave.

Recommendations:

1. At least ten days of paid leave under the Employment Standards Act for workers who are experiencing domestic or sexual violence. We believe at least ten days of leave are required to account for the range of stressors and trauma survivors typically experience. This duration of leave is critical to enable those who have experienced violence to seek the supports they need, for example to access the justice system, health and mental health services, or to be able to find alternative shelter if needed.

In addition, court dates can be frequent for those pursuing legal recourse, and court proceedings often come months, if not years, after the violence has occurred. Furthermore, safe houses often require at least a week stay, and require survivors to not frequent habitual places like work and school. Because abusers often know to find survivors of violence in those places, it creates a risk the abuser following them back to the safe house, placing staff and other residents in danger.

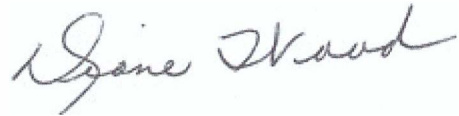
2. That this leave be stand alone. Changes to the Employment Standards Act should ensure this leave is not combined with other types of leave. This leave needs to be a resource for people who are facing one of the worst times in their lives, not a caveat that forces them into giving up other rights they may have under the Employment Standards Act.

3. That there be no burden of proof on workers who need to access leave for domestic and sexual violence. We know that instances of violence and sexual assault are grossly under-reported, and significant barriers exist for survivors to come forward. Having to provide proof to an employer, or supervisor, or anyone else can put workers in a difficult situation with respect to their privacy and safety, especially for vulnerable workers. To be effective, leave needs to come with no requirement to share personal or sensitive information.

4. That compulsory training for employers on a trauma-informed approach to supporting workers who are experiencing domestic or sexual violence. In the Canadian Labour Congress report, *Can Work Be Safe When Home Isn't?*, survey respondents found workplace culture, and lack of employer understanding to be added points of stress for survivors.

5. There be no threshold of length of service for workers to meet before being able to claim leave. All workers deserve to have their jobs protected to allow them to flee from violence and seek supports to deal with its impacts.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diane Wood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Diane Wood
President

cc. Melanie Mark (MLA), Vancouver-Mount Pleasant, New Democratic Party of British Columbia

Mitzi Dean (Parliamentary secretary for Gender Equity), BC NDP

Harry Bains (Minister of Labour), BC NDP

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