

Hon. Doug Ford Premier of Ontario

By email: premier@ontario.ca

RE: Non-profit sector calling on Premier Ford to institute adequate, permanent paid sick days

May 5, 2021

Dear Premier Ford,

We are writing to you as a concerned collective of not-for-profits across Ontario regarding your government's response in this third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. As organizations that serve hundreds of thousands of Ontarians, many of whom face systemic oppressions such as poverty and racism, we feel it is a critical moment to sound the alarm.

We acknowledge that working to end and mitigate the effects of a viral, airborne threat is no small feat for any government. We welcome interventions such as the rollout of vaccines in communities across Ontario, and recent efforts to target hotspots. The latest modeling from Ontario's COVID-19 Science Advisory table calls for targeted interventions among essential workers. While limited interventions have been offered to these workers in recent weeks, the responses fall well short of adequate.

Protections such as uninterrupted access to vaccines and paid sick days to ensure workers who are sick are not forced to go to work have not been made available. The failure to provide the most vulnerable workers with the support they need harms communities that already face structural inequities and systemic violence.

The recently announced paid sick days stopgap for the federal program – giving employers up to \$200 per day to cover off three paid sick days for individuals who need to isolate following a COVID test or to get vaccinated – will not go far enough to support essential workers. Workers need at least 10 paid sick days so that if they are ill, they can safely isolate and prevent the spread of infection.

Long wait times and complicated online booking for hotspot areas are also problematic: Essential workers need flexibility and easy access to booking appointments because they are not in front of a computer all day. These workers are at assembly lines or in child care settings, busy risking their lives in order to keep the economy moving. For many essential workers, the opportunity to get a vaccine at a pop-up site requires standing in line for hours in inclement weather. This is not equitable access.

The lives of essential workers must be valued as much as our society values their labour.

We are also concerned that the advice delivered by the experts at the provincial Science Table is not being acted upon with enough anticipation of the threats ahead. Sweeping late afternoon announcements and knee-jerk decisions erode public trust. One such example is the decree granting additional police powers on April 16 leading to more stop and frisk and predictable racial profiling, regardless of many local forces' official refusal to enforce. Your apology and retraction of the order days later was the right move, but the damage was already done.

Local municipalities should not have to enact public health orders to halt the operations of unsafe workplaces – that order should come from provincial leadership.

Ontarians were heartbroken to hear of the death of 13-year-old Emily Victoria Viega, the daughter of a warehouse worker who succumbed to COVID in her bed at home in Brampton. This death was preventable. Many of the community members we work with and serve face heightened challenges – pandemics upon pandemics – and the failure of policy makers to support them is resulting in much harm and long-term suffering.

We recognize that governing during a pandemic is arduous, never-ending and difficult on many levels. But if we do not keep the lives and contributions of essential workers as the core focus of this crisis response, it will only lead to greater devastation. Black, racialized, newcomer, and migrant workers – many of whom are women – deserve good labour market conditions and protection from COVID-19. We need safer workplaces, a stronger social safety net and equity-responsive policies that work.

In short, we urge the provincial government to take immediate action to:

- 1) Implement the recommendations of the COVID-19 Science Advisory Table;
- 2) Institute 10 permanent, employer paid sick days for all workers in Ontario; and,
- 3) Establish an Equity Advisory Table and take concrete steps to apply an equity lens to all pandemic-related policy decisions.

Thank you for considering our concerns. We welcome the opportunity to provide ongoing input and our assistance to ensure pandemic responses support those who have been most impacted. We would be happy to discuss our sectors' perspectives with you further.

Signed,

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Abrigo Centre
Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services
Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario

Agincourt Community Services Association
Aids Committee of Toronto (ACT)
Applegrove Community Complex
Armagh
Aura Freedom
Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic
Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre
Black Legal Action Centre
caterToronto
CAYR Community Connections (York Region)
Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic
Community Legal Clinic - Brant, Haldimand, Norfolk
Daily Bread Food Bank
Davenport Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre
Downsview CLS
Durham Community Legal Clinic & Access to Justice Hub
Eastview Neighbourhood Community Centre
Elizabeth Fry Toronto
Ernestine's Women's Shelter
Family Service Toronto
Focus for Ethnic Women, Waterloo region inc.
FoodShare Toronto
Haldimand & Norfolk Women's Services
Humaniti
Immigrant Women's National Network
Income Security Advocacy Centre
Injured Workers Community Legal Clinic
Interval House
Interval House of Ottawa Maison Interval d'Ottawa
Jane/Finch Centre
KCWA Family and Social Services
Kingston Interval House
Kinna-aweya Legal Clinic
Lake Country Community Legal Clinic
Lennox and Addington Interval House
Mississauga Community Legal Services
Neighbourhood Legal Services
Newcomer Students' Association
Niagara Community Legal Clinic
North York Community House
ODSP Action Coalition
Ontario ACORN
Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses (OAITH)
Ontario Campaign 2000

Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC)
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)
Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN)
Platform
Positive Living Niagara
Preevanda K. Sapru, Barrister and Solicitor
Progress Toronto
Ralph Thornton Community Centre
Renfrew County Child Poverty Action Network (CPAN)
Scadding Court Community Centre
Sistering
Social Planning Network of Ontario
South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO)
South Asian Women Centre
Sudbury Community Legal Clinic/Clinique juridique communautaire de Sudbury
The Clinic of Guelph and Wellington County
The Neighbourhood Group
The Parkdale Activity – Recreation Centre
The People’s Pantry
Toronto Neighborhood Centres
Victim Services of Durham Region
Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre
West Scarborough Community Legal Services
Willowdale Community Legal Services
Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT)
Women and HIV / AIDS Initiative (Ontario)
Women’s Habitat of Etobicoke
Workers’ Action Centre
Working Women Community Centre
YW Kitchener-Waterloo
YWCA Cambridge
YWCA Durham
YWCA Sudbury
YWCA Toronto

CC:

Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health

Hon. Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development

Hon. Jill Dunlop, Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues