



**ONTARIO
FEDERATION OF
LABOUR**

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January 20, 2022

STATEMENT FROM THE ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

Ontario is in crisis. The Ford government must act now.

Ontario workers are sounding the alarm.

Our province is facing its worst public health crisis since the COVID-19 pandemic began almost two years ago. Health care providers are describing it as a “full-blown emergency.”

And the situation is getting worse with each passing day.

Just weeks into 2022, Ontarians are witnessing the collapse of our health care system. Health care workers are burnt out, demoralized, and getting sick in the thousands. Women and racialized workers are among the hardest hit.

Many health care workers are leaving their jobs, or have left already. There is a massive staff shortage. Ambulances are tied up for hours as understaffed hospitals struggle to offload patients. Long-term care facilities are appealing to restaurants and hotels to help feed their residents.

As Omicron spreads to all regions of the province, we’re running out of beds and tens of thousands of surgeries have been cancelled. Our health care system is rapidly approaching its breaking point.

It didn’t have to be this way.

At every stage of the pandemic, Doug Ford’s government has failed to protect workers and keep our communities safe. Instead of following the advice of public health experts and frontline workers, Ford has taken shortcuts, implemented half-measures, and catered to Big Business.

He has consistently put “economic” concerns ahead of public health and the well-being of Ontarians.

Now Ontarians are paying the price.

Schools aren’t equipped to protect students and education workers. Staff are being forced to work in conditions that fuel the spread of COVID-19. Families are terrified about their kids getting sick, but the lack of affordable childcare means they can’t take time off work to keep them at home.

Most Ontarians still don’t have access to paid sick days. Too many workers must choose between going to work sick or staying home and losing pay. When workers try to isolate, they can’t access testing to show their employers they’re sick.

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Meanwhile, private for-profit testing centres are popping up to fill the void, providing coverage for those who can shell out hundreds of dollars per test. Ford's failure to properly fund our health care system has accelerated the drive to privatized, two-tier health care.

The entire province is reeling from Ford's failures. And women, racialized communities, migrant workers, injured workers, and people with disabilities are bearing the brunt of it.

Enough is enough.

The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) is joining with frontline workers in health care, long-term care, education, and other sectors to issue this emergency appeal. The Ford government must:

1. **Recall the legislature** for an emergency session to address the deepening public health crisis facing Ontarians.
2. **Repeal Bills 124 & 195**, two of the greatest contributing factors to the unprecedented staffing crisis in our health care system. Bill 124 prevents employers from providing urgently needed supports to recruit and retain health care workers. Bill 124 has also negatively impacted hundreds of thousands of public and broader public sector workers in education, childcare, and social services. Similarly, Bill 195 has empowered employers to attack frontline workers' labour rights and is unnecessarily adding to the burn-out of health care workers.
3. **Legislate a minimum of ten permanent employer-paid sick days** for all workers in the province, and ensure an additional 14 paid sick days during the pandemic. Workers who contract COVID at work must also have greater access to WSIB support.
4. **Hold an emergency summit of all stakeholders in the health care system** and develop a rapid response plan to hire the tens of thousands of registered nurses, registered practical nurses, personal support workers, and other health care workers required to address the staffing crisis. In the long term, Ontario requires a strategy to address the chronic underfunding of health care and other public services.
5. **Require health care and educational institutions to provide airborne precautions** to staff, patients, residents, and students, including fit-tested respirators for staff (e.g., N95s), enhanced ventilation (e.g., HEPA filters), and appropriate social distancing measures (e.g., smaller class sizes). The same protections must be extended to frontline workers in grocery stores, food service, transit, and other essential sectors.
6. **Launch an emergency public health campaign** to communicate the urgency of the situation facing Ontarians and to build broad public support for a comprehensive public health strategy.

These demands represent the bare minimum of what is required to confront this unprecedented crisis, but they are only a start. The Ford government must act decisively to implement the full recommendations of public health experts, health care and education professionals, and frontline workers. We can no longer afford shortcuts, half-measures, or empty rhetoric.

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As we issue this emergency appeal to the Ford government, we are also making a direct appeal to the Ontario public: we need your active support to win these demands. Only a united, province-wide response can push the Ford government to act.

If we move together, we can win. But we can't wait a moment longer.

Our lives, our health, and the survival of our health care system are at stake.

These demands have been endorsed by the following labour organizations, which collectively represent more than one million Ontario workers:

Signatories

Patty Coates

President, Ontario Federation of Labour

David Bridger

President, Service Employees International Union (SEIU Local 2)

Karen Brown

President, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)

Jennifer Carr

President, Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC)

David Chartrand

General Vice-President, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW Canada)

Fabrice Colin

President, Laurentian University Faculty Association (LUFA/APPUL)

John Di Nino

President, Amalgamated Transit Union Canada (ATU)

Barb Dobrowolski

President, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA)

David Gale

President, Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA Toronto)

Vas Gunaratna

Director, Workers United Canada Council (WUCC)

Shawn Haggerty

President, United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW Local 175)

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Fred Hahn

President, Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE Ontario)

Arthur Hilliker

President, York University Faculty Association (YUFA)

Greg Hoath

Business Manager, International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE Local 772)

Cathryn Hoy, RN

President, Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA)

Jeff Irons

Vice-President, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW Local 353)

Michelle Johnston

President, Society of United Professionals (IFPTE 160)

Nadia Kerr

President, Association of Professional Student Services Personnel (APSSP)

Jeff Ketelaars

Secretary-Treasurer, United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW Local 333)

Karen Littlewood

President, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO)

Susan Lucek

President, Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union (COPE Local 527)

Yolanda McClean

President, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU Canada)

Angelo Mingarelli

President, Carleton University Academic Staff Association (CUASA)

Jordan Morelli

President, Queen's University Faculty Association (QUFA)

John Nock

President, United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW Local 12R24)

Aldra Pawson

President, Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union (COPE Ontario)

Craig Reynolds

Regional Executive Vice-President, Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC Ontario)

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Alex Silas

Regional Executive Vice-President, Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC National Capital Region)

Jan Simpson

President, Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW)

Sharleen Stewart

President, Service Employees International Union (SEIU Healthcare)

Myles Sullivan

Director-Elect, United Steelworkers (USW District 6)

Warren (Smokey) Thomas

President, Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU/SEFPO)

Michelle Webber

President, Brock University Faculty Association (BUFA)

Sue Wurtele

President, Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA)

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