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December 22, 2020

Via Email: Labour.Minister@gov.ab.ca

Honourable Jason Copping
Minister of Labour and Immigration
Office of the Minister
Labour and Immigration
107 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Copping:

Front-line workers in Alberta are putting their health and their lives on the line by going to work every day to take care of us all.

Those risks are real and the results can be tragic. Earlier this month, the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE) lost a member whose death is attributed to COVID-19 with the passing of Correctional Officer Roger Maxwell, who worked at the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre.

We understand that his death is under investigation. Because there has been a significant outbreak of dozens of cases at the facility, as of December 14, we think the workplace was the most likely source of the infection and hope a decision by the Workers' Compensation Board that the death was workplace related will mean his family can receive benefits.

Many other workers have been infected and while the full effects of the virus are not yet certain, we do know that there could be long-term and even permanent health damage.

Because of the problems with Alberta's contact-tracing system and the chaos caused by the pandemic, it may be impossible to prove where these workers contracted the virus.

This impossibility is not their fault. These heroes and their families should not be made to pay for that failure.

We are asking that your government take four concrete measures to support workers during this pandemic.

First, we ask that you include COVID-19 in the definition of Occupational Disease in the regulations of the *Workers' Compensation Act*, so that workers who acquire the virus would be included and covered by the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB).

G. Smith President	J. Heistad Executive Secretary-Treasurer	K. Barry Vice-President	B. Borodey Vice-President	M. Dempsey Vice-President	B. Gostola Vice-President	S. Slade Vice-President	K. Weiers Vice-President
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In June, the Oxford Academic, Society of Occupational Medicine, said: "The coronavirus disease should be recognized as an occupational disease worldwide to enable compensation, generate statistical analysis and plan preventive measures."

Second, we are asking that your government writes a presumptive clause into the *Workers' Compensation Act*, so that you will deny no workers the help and support they need because they cannot prove the source of their infection, thanks to the failure of contact tracing in Alberta. If these workers die, their deaths should be automatically categorized as workplace deaths, which bring benefits to their families.

Providing this presumptive coverage will mean that workers who are sick will not have the added stress of having to prove, in almost impossible circumstances, where they were infected. Presumptive coverage will mean your government will not deny benefits to families in mourning simply because they cannot prove the source of infection that took the life of a loved one.

Your government should continue to investigate the deaths of all workers thoroughly (including public and private front-line workers in health care, government services, education, retail and transportation), with particular attention to the environmental conditions of their work during the pandemic, such as the availability of PPE, to prevent future incidents.

Workers' compensation coverage has been championed as a no fault insurance coverage. In these cases, the fault does fall on parties and procedures outside of the purview of the worker, yet the worker is held liable for this breakdown. We strongly urge the government that the no fault is extended automatically with acceptance of the claim for the injured worker.

Third, we also ask that your government amend the *Heroes' Compensation Act* so that all front-line workers who die as a result of COVID-19 can access to this benefit. As you know, under the act, when a worker dies as a result of an accident, the WCB makes a lump-sum payment of \$100,000 to the dependents of the worker. We believe that Albertans will enthusiastically support extending this benefit to workers who die from COVID-19.

Finally, we ask that your government backdate all of these changes to the beginning of the pandemic when the government declared a state of public emergency on March 17, 2020.

The pandemic has proved that our communities depend on these people going to work. Your government has rightly called them heroes. We ask that you now show that those were not hollow words.

These are simple requests, and ones that your government can easily grant.

Sincerely,



Susan Slade
Vice President
Alberta Union of Provincial Employees

cc: Workers' Compensation Board
Mr. Trevor Alexander, President and CEO
Ms. Wendy King, Vice-President, Operations and Innovation
Ms. Erna Ference, Chair, Board of Directors