



**your
voice at work**

Edmonton

ph. (780) 452.0362
fx. (780) 451.3099
14040 128 Ave.
Edmonton, AB
T5L 4M8

Calgary

ph. (403) 291.1047
fx. (403) 250.3412
#100, 46 Hopewell Way N.E.
Calgary, AB
T3J 5H7

Red Deer

ph: 403.342.0150
fx: 403.341.3810
#1, 4646 Riverside Drive
Red Deer, AB
T4N 6Y5

Lethbridge

ph. (403) 328.4245
fx. (403) 320.9288
#104, 3305 18 Ave. N.
Lethbridge, AB
T1H 5S1

Brooks

ph. (403) 501.8486
fx. (403) 501.5144
P.O. Box 1148
631 - A Sutherland Dr. E.
Brooks, AB
T1R 1B9

Fort McMurray

ph. (780) 743.4190
fx. (780) 743.8312
#205, 9914 Morrison St.
Fort McMurray, AB
T9H 4A4

Toll Free. 1.800.252.7975

Dental:

1.866.961.6147

Dental (meats):

1.800.667.2816

Safeway PT Benefits:

1.866.544.9686

Superstore PT Benefits:

1.866.342.3513

Pension:

1.888.811.7227

www.ufcw401.ca
ufcw@ufcw401.ab.ca

United Food and Commercial Workers Canada Union, Local No. 401

March 27, 2020

VIA EMAIL: Angelina.algranti@cnib.ca

Angelina Algranti
Acting Director
Vision Loss Rehabilitation
Suite 600 – 11150 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 0C7

Dear Ms. Algranti:

RE: Response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrates the **critical and important role our members play** in our communities. This is something we have always known and expressed at every opportunity for as long as we have existed as an organization.

In bringing service to Albertans, our members provide a key and important service that, especially in times like these, must be respected, valued, and protected.

We understand the evolving nature of the COVID-19 situation and its unique challenges, but **we would like to see all employers be proactive instead of reactive** in dealing with it. The consequences of not acting boldly, decisively, and immediately are too grave to imagine.

Not all employers are reacting to this crisis in the same way, and so the issues we must address differ across industries and from workplace to workplace. In general, our requests are for immediate supports for our members, a sensible approach to labour relations during this unique time, and a dialogue regarding what the future might look like as we head down this most uncertain road.

If you are already implementing elements of what we outline below, we would like to know, and of course, we would insist that you apprise your employees. If there are gaps in your approach, we sincerely want to work with you to find ways to meet them. It is our view that we simply must work through this evolving situation together.

Supports for Your Employees

Given the extraordinary circumstances our members are facing both at work and at home, we are asking all employers to provide the following immediate supports to all employees:

Respect our members

Our members are frontline workers and heroes. Please be kind to our members and take all necessary measures to ensure a **culture of respect** in your workplace, especially from front line managers and department supervisors when communicating. Every subsequent request contained in this letter is an elaboration on what we mean by “respect.”

We call on all employers to provide **immediate accommodation for employees impacted by school and daycare closures**. Furthermore, we assert that, irrespective of collective agreement provisions, all overtime should be voluntary for employees.

We also call for the immediate **waiving of all sick note requirements** for employees. During COVID-19, waiting rooms for Doctors’ offices can be seen as an epicentre for community infection.

Clearly, it is hard, especially at this point, to imagine all circumstances under which an employee may want or need to stay away from work. **If ANY employee wants to stay home and not work at this time and their circumstances are unique and cannot be contemplated by any existing policy or procedures, please contact our Union immediately to have a dialogue about these individuals to ensure that the culture of respect** for which we advocate so strongly carries through for everyone.

At the risk of redundancy, we cannot help but hover around the importance of sensitivity. **It is no one’s place to judge the unique emotions that any individual might have during this very stressful time, and each individual should and must be accommodated by putting the principles of humanity and decency first.**

Proactive Health and Safety approach

We remind you that, even during this unique time, employers have legal and statutory obligations to ensure the health and safety of their employees, which includes **ensuring all employees are informed of all workplace rights, obligations, policies, and rules.**

Financial Assistance for Employees

Employers are uniquely positioned to play a critical role in our societal response to this pandemic. As a matter of social responsibility, employers have an obligation to ensure that **no employee should have to choose between paying their bills and putting their coworkers or the public at risk.**

Many employees feel a willingness to perform a service to the public and clients. But they have also told us that, especially in light of increased client anxiety that work is harder right now.

We are looking for the immediate implementation of financial supports for all employees over an appropriate duration of time that should be no less than the full duration of the risk of COVID-19. We propose appending the following language to the collective agreements:

Public Health Risk Relief

For the duration of the public health threat, employees who cannot work due to self-isolation, layoff, quarantine, personal illness or illness of a loved one, or childcare requirements caused by school closures or other circumstances related to the public health threat shall continue to receive pay as if they continued to work (through whatever combination of STD or EI benefits and employer top-up is necessary to accomplish this objective).

Health benefits

Access to health benefits has never been so important to so many. We are calling on all employers, including employer and/or union trustees, to instruct all benefit plan providers to immediately implement any that may apply:

- waive all waiting periods applicable to access to all benefits;
- suspend all disqualification rules relating to time worked;
- waive all eligibility requirements applicable to short-term and/or long-term disability benefits for all employees;
- extend coverage to all employee who might not otherwise be eligible for coverage; and
- create a new type of coverage that provides benefit for anxiety or stress-related to COVID-19 matters.

We are calling on all employers who do not already provide short-term disability benefits to all of their employees to immediately extend such eligibility to all employees, regardless of the hours they work.

We are reminding all employers that it is not enough to just acknowledge the heroism of their employees at this time through words. There must be real meaningful dollars available and committed to employees to ensure that words are backed up with actions.

Sensible Approach to Labour Relations

We have a collective agreement

Our collective agreement is as important as any law currently impacting your business. We are sure you would agree that respect for the rule of law should be upheld during this unique time.

We remind you that our existing collective agreement remains in full force and effect and that we are closely monitoring adherence to it. Where there are circumstances where we might consider some flexibility, that would only be considered by us through full consultation with the union members who we represent.

Suspension of all grievance time limits

This circumstance is disruptive in many ways. We are hereby requesting the **immediate suspension of all grievance time limits** and their application to both parties in the collective agreement. In fact, we are going to treat time limits as having been waived by the employer unless you expressly object in writing providing a full rationale. Employers are asking their workers to be cooperative and put the public first. Frankly, we cannot imagine why you would object to this request.

Furthermore, we are requesting a Letter of Understanding outlining an **expedited dispute resolution process** for all issues, both those that have arisen out of this unique time and any that were established previously. We are happy to discuss this with you.

Transparency around the sharing of information

People are currently under a lot of pressure, and we all have a job to do. Issues arising during this time frame may continue to exist well into the future. We are requesting that you share all information

that may be relevant to us, pursuant to our collective bargaining relationship, so that these issues don't become on-going concerns.

We will represent

We should advise that our offices are not closing, and our union is going to continue to represent our members. In fact, we are looking for ways to enhance our representation for UFCW Local 401 members during this difficult time.

Whether it is through visits to your workplaces, conference calls, or whatever other means might be necessary, we appreciate your full cooperation in respecting our Union's desire to be there any way we can for our members who are confronting such a unique time and unique challenges.

Questions

At this time, we have the following questions that we hope will commence a dialogue that will be helpful for everyone:

1. **Can you please identify any of the above requests that you would be prepared to implement immediately**, and which will require further discussion? Please advise when you will be available to discuss these items.
2. **Do you have plans to close operations or layoff any employees?** If so, will you provide the supports to employees as noted above.
3. Many employers are looking at ways to show their appreciation to their workers for working during this stressful situation and dealing with more anxious clients than normal. Have you considered anything around this?
4. **Will you join us in our efforts to lobby governments** to provide supports for workers through this period?

We understand the evolving nature of this situation and the unique challenges it has created. It is our view that the only way to confront the pandemic is as a social system – that includes the cooperation and functioning of all component parts (governments, employers, and unions) working in solidarity for the public good.

We await your reply to these urgent requests.

Sincerely,



Thomas Hesse
President



Richelle Stewart
Secretary-Treasurer

cc. Matthew Kay – matthew.kay@vlrehab.ca