

BULLETIN

Community social services: members begin ratification process

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Members of the Union Bargaining Association representing community social services workers are scheduled to complete ratification votes on a tentative collective agreement by April 19.

HSAs bargaining team, and the other 12 unions in the UBA, concluded six months of grueling bargaining with a tentative agreement that achieved HSA members top priority of enhanced job security, but at the cost of significant concessions.

Bargaining began against a backdrop of severe government funding cuts to community social services, administrative upheaval in the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and a provincial government which had clearly demonstrated its willingness to interfere in free collective bargaining by using legislation to impose extreme, concessionary contracts on workers.

The Community Social Services Employers Association (CSSEA) began bargaining by tabling an extensive list of demands for concessions.

The demands included significant rollbacks in nearly every cost item in the collective agreement, plus the elimination or weakening of a range of non-cost items. The latter included such things as re-introducing 24-hour shifts (for which workers would be paid only 10 hours), introducing "personal suitability" as a factor in selections for all positions and eliminating anti-harassment language from the collective agreement.

Instead of engaging in constructive negotiations, CSSEA then made an application to the Labour Relations Board, arguing that all existing collective agreements in the sector had essentially been rendered void by legislation passed by the provincial Liberals in May 2003 (Bill 61, the Community Services Labour Relations Act). The UBA successfully argued against this application. CSSEA then exerted enough pressure on its member employers to extract a mandate to lock out workers in the sector, to back up their demands for concessions.

Throughout, the UBA continued to look for ways to achieve the chief bargaining priority of enhanced job security, and to minimize the concessions members would have to make to achieve this goal.

After months of hard work, the UBA achieved an agreement that contains several different provisions which enhance job security for members, both with their current employers, and in the event that the work they perform moves to another employer.

In exchange, new employees and employees moving to new classifications will start out at wage rates equal to 85 per cent of the 2001 wage rate, and gradually increase to 100 per cent of this rate as they accumulate hours.

Sick leave benefits will be reduced for all employees, and employees will begin to pay a portion of their MSP premiums. Job evaluation and pay equity adjustments which were to be paid retroactive to October 1, 2002, will be deferred until April 1, 2006, with no retroactive pay.

-No union or negotiator wants to agree to concessions," said Josef Rieder, Senior Labour Relations Officer and HSAs representative on the UBA.

-Before joining the HSA staff, I worked in community social services. Since becoming an LRO, Ive continued to work with our members in this sector. Ive seen their hard work and dedication first-hand, and know they deserve every penny theyre paid."

-But I also know their priority in this round of bargaining is to save jobs, and to be able to provide the continuity of service thats so essential to their clients. I believe the tentative agreement is the best way to achieve these goals."

HSAs Community Social Services bargaining team and Board of Directors are recommending that members support ratification of the proposed agreement. [Click here for up-to-date information about community social services bargaining.](#) 

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