

PAID LEAVE FOR WORKERS EXPERIENCING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



BACKGROUND

Since 2016, the BC Federation of Labour and its committees have called for no less than 10 days of paid leave for workers facing what we now term gender-based violence. We welcomed the BC government's implementation of the current five days last year as a solid start — but improvements are urgently needed.

Under the current policy interpretation, leave can be used for a multitude of different purposes, including for counselling or other psychological services, obtaining legal advice, seeking medical attention and finding new housing.

But it is unreasonable to expect workers to take care of all these needs in just five working days, even if they are not taken at the same time. And taking additional unpaid leave places a financial burden upon survivors of gender-based violence — one that may be a barrier to leaving an abusive situation.

We are looking forward to improvements that would allow more workers able to benefit from the leave provisions, and provide more paid time off to workers experiencing violence.

a note on terminology:

Community groups we have consulted have told the BCFED that not all two-spirit, non-binary or trans community members see their relationships reflected in the phrase “sexual and domestic violence.” Accordingly, we have adopted the term gender-based violence.

THE WAY FORWARD FOR BC

The BC government can send a strong message of support to workers experiencing gender-based violence, by ensuring they have at least 10 paid days off to seek the wraparound services that they require.

Jurisdictions including the Philippines and the Netherlands have adopted 10 days of paid leave, and federal NDP leader Jagmeet Singh campaigned on 10 days of paid leave for workers experiencing gender-based violence in the last federal election. A further five days of paid leave for workers in BC would be especially timely given the intensification of gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

DECLARING A GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH IN BC

Education and awareness-raising are critical to addressing gender-based violence. Declaring a Gender-Based Violence Awareness Month in BC would boost public awareness and education around an issue that remains staggeringly prevalent in BC and across Canada. By taking this small step, BC could lead the country in making a big impact on public understanding of what *UN Women* has called the Shadow Pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The BC Federation of Labour recommends that the BC government:

1. Amend the existing legislation on paid leave for gender-based violence to include no less than 10 days paid leave per year, with at least 17 weeks total leave time.
2. Declare a Gender-Based Violence Awareness month in BC, as a means to further public education and dialogue.