



UNION OF SAFETY AND JUSTICE EMPLOYEES

December 15, 2021

Submission to the Workers' Compensation Act
Committee of Review
Regina, SK

On behalf of the Union of Safety and Justice Employees (USJE), we would like to take the opportunity to formally endorse the submission from the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) in regard to the Workers' Compensation Review that is currently ongoing.

USJE is a national public service union that represents eighteen thousand federal public service employees, including all those who work in a rehabilitative capacity at the Correctional Service of Canada, and thousands of public service employees within the RCMP, as well as sixteen other federal agencies and departments under the jurisdiction of the federal Public Safety Minister.

USJE has taken a strong interest in the current review of the Workers' Compensation Act in Saskatchewan owing to the presence of federal Correctional facilities in your province, as well as the 114 RCMP detachments in Saskatchewan, Divisional headquarters, and the RCMP Depot.

In particular, we believe that the SFL recommendations are particularly relevant to the experience of many USJE's members in Saskatchewan because of the crucial public safety work they undertake in various roles, and their front facing interactions with members of the public and/or vulnerable populations in order to advance public safety outcomes.

There is no doubt that your current legislative framework recognizes the legitimacy and impacts of psychological injuries, something that unfortunately affects so many public safety personnel. **These individuals are not limited to traditional first responders, but include thousands of public safety employees who work 'behind the scenes' to support crucial public safety outcomes, and who endure psychological impacts owing to direct or indirect exposure to traumatic incidents, materials and other workplace experiences.**

Within the Correctional Service of Canada, USJE's members include all Institutional and Community Parole Officers, Program Officers, tradespeople, frontline staff, teachers, administrative staff, among many others. Other federal public service employees represented by USJE include the thousands of individuals who support the day-to-day operations of hundreds of RCMP detachments, as well as those who provide crucial expertise and support to the operational and investigative work of the RCMP's Regional and National Headquarters.

With this mind, the recommendation from the SFL to **update policies to expand psychological injury coverage to those who have suffered from workplace harassment, and those individuals dealing with psychological health issues stemming from the pandemic is particularly germane.**

USJE's extensive efforts over the past year have revealed that federal correctional employees who work in congregate settings (federal penitentiaries, treatment facilities, Community Correctional facilities), community parole offices and/or those serving the public within the RCMP in Saskatchewan, and across the country, have had to navigate high stress situations in managing risk when it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic. These situations, unfortunately, have sometimes exacted a heavy toll on the wellbeing of many public service employees.

Further, **the SFL's recommendation to expand presumptive WCB coverage to include workers affected by illnesses or diseases contracted while at work, including COVID-19 is also quite relevant to USJE.**

We find the analysis by the SFL in support of this recommendation very pertinent:

"The current COVID-19 pandemic has shown how quickly a virus can spread throughout the workplace. The majority of outbreaks in Saskatchewan occurred in workplaces, and hundreds of workers became sick, and sadly, even died due to contracting COVID-19 in the workplace. Many workers who became ill due to an outbreak in their workplace reported difficulties in filing a WCB claim and had to deal with a lengthy claims process while fighting a dangerous and potentially lethal virus that has also proven to cause long term health problems for those who do recover. Placing workers in a position to have to prove they contracted an infection from the workplace is difficult and time consuming. Many workers have put their own health and safety on the line simply going to work every day and increasing their risk of becoming ill."

In closing, the Union of Safety and Justice Employees would like to recognize the leadership of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, Government of Saskatchewan, including the Ministry of Labour, on their collaborative and proactive approach to ensuring presumptive injury coverage for those suffering from psychological injuries owing to workplace events and experiences.

For further information on the experience of USJE's members within the federal public service employees, you may consult USJE'S 2019 report, ***Protecting Public Safety: The Challenges facing Federal Parole Officers in Canada's Highly Stressed Criminal Justice System or USJE's 2017 report, Moving Forward: A report on the invisible toll of psychological trauma on federal public safety workers.*** It revealed that psychological trauma is widespread among federal public safety personnel for a variety of reasons.

We look forward to learning the outcome of the ongoing review.

Sincerely,

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President, USJE-SESJ

SYNDICAT DES EMPLOYÉ-E-S DE LA SÉCURITÉ ET DE LA JUSTICE



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