

Hon. Jason Copping
Minister of Labour
107, Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue NW
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

May 17, 2021

Minister Copping,

Since November, Alberta's NDP has made repeated calls on your provincial government to implement paid sick leave during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure workers aren't forced to choose between isolating with symptoms and providing for their families.

Over the same period, Ontario, Manitoba, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia have all implemented their own programs that offer support over-and-above the federal Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit.

A U.S. study on the effects of temporary paid sick leave, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), demonstrated an estimated 50 per cent reduction in the number of COVID-19 cases per state per day.

Minister, we were pleased to work with you directly on establishing three hours of paid vaccination leave for all Alberta workers. As you know, development of this bill took little more than a day and passage through the House took less than an hour.

In the hopes of encouraging a similar process when it comes to paid sick leave, we have drafted a piece of legislation for your review, the Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave), 2021. A copy of the draft bill is included with this letter.

When we act together and act on evidence, we can make a difference for the health of Albertans and we can set up our province to come out of the pandemic strong and ready for a rapid economic recovery. Let's work together to lock-in and strengthen the progress Albertans have made fighting the virus by introducing a paid sick leave plan that:

- Is a seamless benefit provided by the employer and accessible from Day 1 of an employee showing symptoms or being a close contact of someone with COVID-19;
- Maintains the regular wage/salary of a sick worker so that they stay home; and,

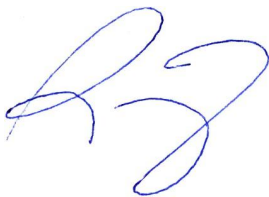
- Compensates employers for this by working with the federal government on a cost-shared program.

The Official Opposition proposes providing every worker with up to 10 days of paid sick leave for themselves or a dependent. This is in line with the actual amount of time people are required to isolate when ill. An isolating worker would continue to be paid through their employer, who would be reimbursed by the provincial government. This would be a made-in-Alberta plan of 10-days leave that would entirely replace the federal Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit. The federal benefit has been cumbersome for workers and has proven inadequate for stopping the workplace spread of COVID-19. Instead, we advocate one cost-shared program.

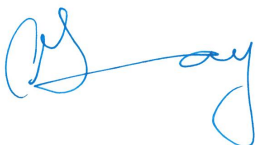
Like the Ontario and British Columbia models, the Alberta provincial government can use the Workers Compensation Benefit system of employer accounts to work with and reimburse employers.

This is a temporary program that would remain in place until the end of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, we also believe a broader consultation is needed urgently on permanent paid sick days for Alberta workers. You will likely know that British Columbia has committed to a permanent paid sick leave program. We were very pleased the government agreed to work with us to provide three paid hours of leave for all workers to go and get themselves vaccinated. So I urge the government to work with us again, in that same spirit, and provide paid sick leave for all working Albertans.

Sincerely,



Rachel Notley
Leader of the Official Opposition, MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona



Christina Gray, MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods and NDP Labour Critic