

March 27, 2020



Honourable Scott Fielding
Minister of Finance
Room 103, Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Dear Minister Fielding,

Thank you for our recent conversation about urgently needed protections and supports for workers and their families during this unprecedented pandemic emergency. We appreciate that all governments and the workers providing critically important services across a variety of sectors are working incredibly hard and under intense pressure to support one another and to help in our collective public health efforts to flatten the COVID-19 curve.

The current pandemic has highlighted the increased risks facing workers who are being asked to stay at work during this health crisis to continue to provide needed services and products for all of us. It is vitally important that we do everything we can to make sure they stay safe on the job.

I am writing to you today to ask that you make a significant investment in Manitoba Workplace Safety and Health in order to increase the number of workplace safety and health inspections being carried out, and expand the informational resources for workers and employers about preventative measures needed to keep Manitobans safe from COVID-19 at work.

Manitoba Workplace Safety and Health plays a critical role not only in enforcing rules to ensure safe and healthy workplaces, but in educating workplaces in this regard. The COVID-19 emergency has only served to highlight the importance of these functions.

Trained provincial safety and health officers are best placed to educate and respond to worker and employer questions and concerns about preventing COVID-19 transmission prevention on the job. These officers should also be equipped with personal protective equipment when physically responding to workplace investigations.

We are concerned that the significant cut of more than half a million dollars to Manitoba Workplace Safety and Health in your most recent budget will severely hamper your government's ability to educate workplaces about COVID-19 safety, to address the flood of questions coming from workers and employers alike about what they should be doing to stay safe at work, and to ensure that workplace health and safety rules are upheld as an integral part of government's public health response to the pandemic.

We note also with significant concern that workplace safety and health inspections are down by close to 3,000 inspections per year, as compared to five years ago.

With new rules in place to limit public gatherings, Manitoba's workplaces remain the largest congregations of people in our province, and so ensuring they remain safe is critically important to the overall public health response to COVID-19. We urge you to immediately restore the Budget 2020 budget cut and expand resources for Manitoba Workplace Safety and Health at this critical time. The ability of Workplace Safety and Health to provide clear and accurate information and advice, to carry out workplace inspections, and to enforce the rules could make a real difference in our ability to flatten the curve of the spread of this virus.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K Rebeck', is positioned above the typed name.

Kevin Rebeck
President of the Manitoba Federation of Labour

CC. Premier Brian Pallister

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