

Dear Neighbour,

I work in the health and social services system. For years my co-workers and I have been seeing our working conditions deteriorate, affecting the quality of the services we provide. For the last four decades, whenever it has come time to negotiate working conditions, successive governments have put off the necessary corrective measures to another day.

This is why we now find ourselves with tens of thousands of workers who are not only underpaid for their indispensable work but also exhausted. We were unprepared to deal with the current public health crisis because we were desperately short-staffed well before the pandemic began, and things have only gotten worse since then.

When the crisis broke out, despite the urgent need to redress our working conditions, our union asked the government to suspend

bargaining on a new collective agreement and let us focus on fighting COVID-19. The government refused and said it wanted to speed up the bargaining process instead. Meanwhile, they imposed even harsher working conditions than before, without any discussion with our union. For example, they are forcing us to work overtime, moving us from our usual workplaces, and cancelling vacations. They have refused to do what it takes to keep frontline workers safe. As a result, more than 30,000 health care workers have been infected and have spread the virus, which is the last thing we want to do. Many risked their lives, some have died. And there's the constant fear of infecting our own family.

After more than a hundred meetings at the bargaining tables, the government has not agreed to any



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solutions. You've probably heard of François Legault's promise to pay orderlies \$26 an hour, but he hasn't even offered that at the bargaining table! Workers in the health and social services system have chosen to serve the public because we want to take care of other people, treat them, support them, protect them, help them get back on their feet, and we find the work rewarding. But we shouldn't be expected to endanger our own health and that of the people we serve. Did you know that the highest rate of employees missing work because of injury or illness is now in the health care system? Burnouts are plaguing our health care system.

And still the government refuses to apply preventive measures. Overtime hours are increasing steadily and the government's only solution is for us to work just as hard for less money and with unstable hours, making it impossible to balance work and family responsibilities. They don't want to hire more staff or tackle work overload. There has been no work reorganization, no attempt to support work-life balance, no improvement in working conditions that would make it possible to attract new employees to the health and social services system or to retain experienced employees. On the contrary, the government seems to be doing everything to drive employees out. Never has there been a spate of resignations in the health care and social services system like what we're seeing now.



We can't give up; the stakes are too high. The government has to listen to us! At this point, we have no choice but to consider stepping up our pressure tactics – and, as a last resort, preparing for a strike – if the government persists in ignoring the problems we face on a daily basis.

This decision is not taken lightly. You can count on our professionalism to make sure our pressure tactics don't endanger anyone's health and safety. It's a foregone conclusion that the government will say it can't afford better working conditions and that this is not the right time. But it seems it's never the right time to provide decent conditions for the people who pour their hearts into their work every day. We have been on the front lines for almost a year. We're at the end of our rope. We've decided to stand up and fight for real change. I hope that you will support us, because we're not just fighting for ourselves – we're fighting for you, for your families, for your loved ones and for all our neighbours.

**Public services are crumbling.
Do something, Mr. Legault!**