

NEW GOVERNMENT OFFER : NOT EVEN CLOSE!

On Wednesday, March 31, 2021, just as we were making noise to mark the first anniversary of the expiry of the collective agreement, the government presented us with a new comprehensive offer. The FSSS-CSN bargaining committee considers what the government calls its “third offer” to be nothing more than a PR exercise. It contains no significant improvements over the previous offers.

For the issues that are common to the entire Québec public sector, such as wages, see the newsletter [published by the CSN](#).

Issues specific to our workplaces

For the health and social services sectoral table, the government offer essentially consists of its previous offers, based on its priorities, plus some very slight movement on a few of our demands.

Since the beginning of these bargaining talks, the government has wanted to talk only about its priorities and has shown little interest in resolving the problems that we, the workers, have pointed out. Its latest offer is no exception.

Overview

The government has not increased the \$24 million it had earmarked for improving the working conditions of all employees. This amount falls far short of what is needed. Since the beginning of the negotiations, we have been arguing that a major effort is required to improve our working conditions, which have been battered by years of austerity and reforms.

Class 1

For nursing and cardio-respiratory care professionals, the government is offering us its solutions, which include increasing the number of full-time staff. However, it is absolutely refusing to discuss mandatory overtime, staffing ratios or excessive workloads.

Classes 2 and 3

The government is not offering anything in particular to the 100,000 or so paratechnical personnel, auxiliary services and trades personnel, office



personnel and administrative technicians and professionals. It says it wants to correct some problems with pay for beneficiary attendants (PABs) and health and social services aides (ASSSs). We will come back to this point.

Class 4

The government has nothing for health and social services technicians and professionals, except for youth centre staff. We agree that youth centres are vitally important and the situation there is critical. But they are by no means the only institutions that have been sorely neglected in recent years! Moreover, the measures and paltry sums of money on the table are very far from meeting the dire needs in youth protection.

The government's demands: Further deterioration for workers

The government still wants to change overtime rules to cut costs. For example, they don't want to pay overtime for working on weekly days off. Basically, they want to force employees to work as much or more, but pay them less. They are also targeting some Class 3 computer services jobs, for which they want to increase the regular work week to 40 hours. And they want to reduce training budgets. In short, the demands are as insulting as ever, at a time when the health care and social services system is struggling to attract and retain workers.

No satisfactory response to the union's demands

The government is still showing no willingness to make immediate improvements to occupational health and safety.

It still wants to discuss telework at an inter-round committee, with no guarantee of improvements.

And to all our other proposed solutions – for eliminating excessive workloads, instituting a real occupational health and safety program, promoting work-life-study balance, maintaining sufficient staffing levels at all times, measures to attract and retain personnel, and recognition – the government’s responses are disappointing, to say the least.

ASSS and PAB wages: still no sign of the promised \$26 for all

We have been in talks with the government for months about settling the pay equity complaints for PABs and ASSSs. Although François Legault trumpeted at a press conference that he wanted to raise their wages to \$26 an hour, we’re still waiting to see that offer at the pay equity table. We have been very flexible about the solution, while insisting that it must fully respect employees’ rights, as these two job titles have been fighting for pay equity since 2015 (PABs) and 2010 (ASSSs).

The government is now offering to move PABs and ASSSs up from rank 7 to rank 9 and pay them at a single rate of \$23.87 per hour, but only once we sign an agreement in principle. In order to continue claiming in public that it is offering PABs working in CHSLDs \$26 per hour, the government is adding in premiums – which are conditional on working full-time, with no absences, and are applicable to CHSLDs only. At the same time, the government is proposing other changes, including the creation of a PAB Team Leader job title, which was on our own list of demands.

No retroactivity

There is one major problem with the government’s offer: it neglects the need to settle our pay equity complaints. Our position is that the

PABs should have been moved to a higher rank after the 2015 pay equity audits and the ASSSs in 2010. The women who hold these jobs are therefore entitled to substantial retroactive payments, since the situation should have been corrected long ago. The government is asking us to relinquish the money that is due.

The situation is critical, mobilization is critical!

Over the past few weeks, CSN unions across the public sector have obtained mandates to step up mobilization efforts and prepare for strike action. A robust action plan is currently being prepared. You will soon receive more information on this. We are well aware that mobilizing is a challenge in these difficult times. We were already overloaded before the crisis and the pandemic certainly hasn’t helped! But we can’t let this government take advantage of the situation to trample our rights and hopes underfoot.

The only way to respond to the government is action on the ground. In the coming weeks, all CSN members will be asked to vote on a strike mandate, by secret ballot, at general meetings. Local pressure tactics are planned for mid-April. We will also make our voices heard on May 1., International Workers’ Day. Finally, a Québec-wide day of protest is being planned for mid-May. For more information, contact your union reps.

Day after day, we must grow our numbers and grow our strength!