

December 7, 2009

## **Pilot project in youth protection in Québec's Far North and attraction-retention premium: a clarification from the FSSS-CSN**

### **To all technicians and professionals**

Comrades,

During a surprise visit August 20-21-22, 2009 to the territory served by the Kuujjuaq and Puvirnituk health and social services facilities, ministers Lise Thériault and Pierre Corbeil announced a few measures aimed at improving the living and working conditions of personnel working in health care and social services in the various localities.

One of their announcements caused and continues to cause a lot of waves: the establishment of a pilot project to improve the offer of services and provide support for social service workers in youth protection which, as everyone (or nearly everyone!) knows, is in a state of major crisis. Basically, the project would create two teams of caseworkers (five per team) from various regions of Québec who would alternate working in localities in the Far North. The project's goal is to provide support to the technicians and professionals already working in these places so as to provide more services to the population. The caseworkers recruited "down South" would be paid a premium equal to 12% of their salary; the same premium would be paid to workers already located in the Far North who are identified as youth protection employees.

The project was to begin on September 1 but is only now beginning to be implemented. The delay was caused by an avalanche of challenges from all the social service workers already located in the Far North, various employers and our Federation.

Moreover, we were very surprised to see a letter signed by Ms. Johanne Paquette stating that all the national union bodies, including the FSSS and the CSN, had been consulted about the project; it's not true!

The truth is that a senior public servant at the MSSS informed us briefly of the project's existence on August 20, when the ministerial delegation was already on board the plane and flying to Puvirnituk! We were informed, but never consulted about the project. And we never approved it either. In fact, here are a few excerpts from the press release we issued after the ministers' visit:

*"...Although the measures announced constitute a breath of fresh air for these workers, they still fall far short of what is needed and don't solve all the problems. This is especially true for human resources, since the labour shortages currently affecting Québec as a whole are felt more acutely in remote regions.*

*"The announcements by ministers Thériault and Corbeil have the effect of improving working conditions for a small proportion of personnel – those working in youth protection – at the expense of their colleagues, who endure the same conditions. This will inevitably lead to new inequities in working conditions, new tensions and a certain disillusionment for the many employees who have worked in Nunavik for years.*

*"The approach announced is synonymous with the Charest government's failure to recognize their contribution to the well-being of the Inuit population, and a lack of respect for the personnel..."*

We fully agree with the position of your union president, who sent a letter to Mr. Gilles Boulet on November 3 that gave a very good overview of the situation prevailing throughout the Inuit territory in social services and for all the technicians and professionals working to provide them.

The FSSS-CSN is stepping up its efforts to improve your living and working conditions in Québec's Far North. Right now, we are concentrating on the current round of bargaining to renew collective agreements. If the work now in progress does not lead to a satisfactory settlement, particularly with respect to the attraction and retention premium, we believe that there is a clear risk of a breakdown in services for the population living in northern areas.

And the government will have only itself to blame!

The vice-president responsible for the sector,



LAURIER GOULET