

VIA EMAIL: [PREMIER@novascotia.ca](mailto:PREMIER@novascotia.ca)

May 9, 2017

Premier Stephen McNeil  
Office of the Premier  
7th Floor, One Government Place  
1700 Granville Street  
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 1X5

Dear Premier McNeil:

**Re: Social Workers – Child Protection**

We are reaching out to you on behalf of our members who are Social Workers working in Child Protection across this province.

These members work with children and youth who are in the care of the province or who are in need of support every day. Their jobs are incredibly rewarding and they love what they do. However, at this time, members in a number of offices are in crisis due to a variety of issues including caseload management and lack of staff. They fear for their own safety and the safety of the children in care. They have real concerns about their ability to uphold the Standard of care required; i.e. that they conduct a home visit within 30 days of their involvement with a child. They are also feeling unsupported and vulnerable in the workplace and workplace mental health is a real concern. We are bringing this information to you in the hopes of swift action to help support our members and the important work they do for the children in care.

We have collected a number of constructive suggestions for improving our members' working conditions and consequently the service they provide. These came from multiple meetings with our members over the past months. We are including the most pressing ones here and would be very willing to sit and discuss other ideas our members have to improve the workplace and this vital service.

- Firstly, vacancies must be filled immediately. We have some members working in offices which are only 50 percent staffed - where there should be 16 caseworkers, there are only 8. In these offices other workers may have to pick up unattended cases, or they may be left to languish. There is a very real fear amongst our members that children are at risk right now in offices where vacancies have not been filled.

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- Our members are suggesting the immediate creation of a “float team”. This team would clean up caseload backlog and allow the social workers to properly attend to their own cases. The team would move from location to location throughout the year.
- Our members in the busier locations such as Dartmouth are asking that a permanent “screening team” be created. This team would be comprised of specialized social workers who would staff the phones. This team exists in the Northern Region. Proper resourcing of this team is essential.
- The Department should immediately conduct workload measurement of all its offices and programs.
- Improved Occupational Health & Safety training and risk assessment tools for Social Workers; especially as they relate to home visits and the potential for coming in contact with drugs like Fentanyl or potentially dangerous members of the public.

We are also interested in any work the Department is doing regarding recommendations that have come out of inquiries into deaths of children in care in other provinces so we can do our best to avoid this happening here.

The work of our members in Child Protection has changed substantially since the 1990s, the cases are more complex and there are many more contacts involved with each child. Where in the 90's, a child may have had five contacts associated with their file, now there may be as many as 25.

Add to this, an expanded role for the Social Worker, found in your government's amendments to the *Act Respecting Services to Children and their Families, the Protection of Children and Adoption*, legislated in March of this year without any additional resources or appreciation of what this change means to an already overwhelming workload for most Social Workers.

Our members in many offices are burning out, they are getting sick, and they are more and more concerned that something terribly bad is going to happen because their day-to-day work is unmanageable due to understaffing. It is clear they need support - and soon.

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Please let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to you hearing from you in the near future,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JM', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jason MacLean  
President

JML/lb

- c. L. Langley, Public Service Commissioner, PSC
- R. King, Provincial Labour Relations Executive Director, PSC
- J. Baillie, Leader, PC
- G. Burrill, Leader, NDP