



May 4, 2020

Hon. Brian Warr
Minister of Education and
Early Childhood Development
PO Box 8700
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

Dear Minister Warr:

I am writing to express concerns regarding the financial hardship, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic response measures, being experienced by substitute teachers in this province. On March 16, 2020, the NLTA immediately began lobbying and advocating, both provincially and federally, for economic relief for its most vulnerable members, our substitute teachers.

At the federal level, this advocacy included meetings with the Employment Insurance Commissioner for Workers, and our representative in the federal Cabinet, the Honourable Seamus O'Regan, Minister of Natural Resources. We have written to all Newfoundland and Labrador MP's as well as the federal Ministers of Families, Children and Social Development; Labour, Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion; Rural Economic Development; Finance; the Minister responsible for the Status of Women; and the Prime Minister.

Through our advocacy efforts, the Association has made the following recommendations:

1. Decrease the number of insurable hours required for regular EI eligibility

Many substitute teachers have not yet met eligibility hours for regular EI benefits and are unlikely to accumulate further hours of insurable employment in the remaining months of the school year. When CERB support runs out, as early as the middle of July, they will be without any income for the remainder of the summer non-teaching period and into the fall if earnings remain low. This change would enable more substitute teachers to access EI benefits after the CERB payments terminate.

2. Expand the maximum number of weeks of eligibility for regular EI benefits

Compared to the calculation of EI benefits in normal times, teachers have fewer accumulated insurable hours, fewer weeks of employment over the qualifying period, and fewer opportunities for more weeks of higher earnings. The regional rate of unemployment used to calculate benefit entitlements does not fully reflect the impact of the pandemic and is unrealistic at this time. This means many teachers who are approved for EI after March 15th will have fewer weeks of benefits and may have lower benefit amounts. This change would help to mitigate, at least in part, those factors which are beyond substitute teachers' control in these challenging times.

3. Increasing allowable earnings thresholds (CERB and EI) for those who still have part-time employment income during the suspension of regular K-12 school instruction;

Many teachers start their careers by taking part-time contracts, often in locations far away from their families, and rely on substitute work during unscheduled time to supplement their part-time income.

The federal government has announced that workers can make up to \$1,000 a month and still receive the CERB. Previously you were only eligible if you had no income. This has assisted some substitute teachers; however, part time teachers are still caught in the middle, without access to the additional income from substitute work upon which they normally rely. A new teacher in a 25% contract earns approximately \$1,380 per month (gross), which exceeds the CERB eligibility threshold. Even if this teacher were eligible for regular EI, those benefits are offset, partially or fully, by the part-time income they are receiving, leaving them nowhere near a reasonable living wage.

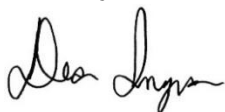
4. Decreasing the number of insurable hours required for EI special benefits (maternity and parental).

Expectant parents (particularly those due to deliver or adopt in the fall) who did not have 600 hours of insurable employment by mid-March face bleak prospects for accumulating the additional required hours between now and when their babies are due. This, compounded by the impact the suspension of in-school classes is having on their current financial situation, means that many of these same individuals will have to apply for the CERB for 4 months of support right now. This change would remove barriers to financial assistance needed to care for their newborn or newly-adopted children.

As you know, I have previously raised concerns with you and the Premier regarding the impact COVID-19 is having on substitute teachers. I wish to remind you of the critical role substitute teachers play in ensuring a smoothly operating education system. Everything from government and district professional learning plans, extra-curricular activities, maintaining continuity in instruction, and supporting the health and wellness of all teachers is dependent upon our substitute teachers. It is therefore critically important to provide all substitute teachers with the necessary financial support to ensure that they remain connected to the profession and available when in-school classes resume.

I am asking that the provincial government support the NLTA federal lobbying efforts for changes to both the CERB and EI Insurance programs to address the gaps in support we have identified. I am also asking that your government take steps to compensate substitute teachers for the lost income resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,



DEAN INGRAM
President

c: Hon. Dwight Ball, Premier