



Community Services
Office of the Deputy Minister

PO Box 696, Halifax, NS B3J 2T7
www.gov.ns.ca

MEMORANDUM

TO: [REDACTED]
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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

CC: Nicole McKim
Dustin Rioux
Shaun Butler
Heather R. Kearney
Heather Laidlaw

FROM: Tracey Taweel, Deputy Minister

DATE: December 20, 2021

RE: Labour Management Committee Final Recommendations

I am writing in response to the meeting held on November 30, 2021, where the co-chairs of the four Provincial Labour Management Committees presented the final recommendations of the committees. Thank you for your participation and leadership to this work and for your thoughtful recommendations. This Memorandum can be considered the employer's formal response to the recommendations.

1. PTSD – Presumptive Benefits

Recommendation:

The Deputy Minister support and advocate to expand the definition of “front-line or emergency-response worker” in the provisions respecting presumptive benefits for workers diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder in the Workers’ Compensation Act, Nova Scotia to include all social workers employed in direct child welfare services.

Response:

The Deputy Minister commits to writing a letter to the Deputy Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration, requesting consideration of expansion of the definition of “front-line or emergency-response worker” to include all social workers employed in direct child welfare services with the Department of Community Services.

2. **Workload**

Recommendations:

- a. Create a pool of “relief/casual” social workers that could come in to cover vacations, STI, after hours on call, and other leaves.
- b. Use annual average vacancies to create a pool of casual/term positions that are not tagged to one specific position.
- c. Establish new caseload maximums.
- d. For each program conduct a workload analysis.
- e. Analysis of positions being unfilled/vacant due to leaves and turnover (consider double filling positions for planned leaves such as maternity).
- f. Build on Reclaiming Social Work initiative (review work duties; redistribute functions to other social workers, admin support, case aides, and/or others; review pieces under policy that are mandatory and creating administrative burden; request program division to have ongoing consultations and engagement with Service Delivery in the development of programs and policy).

Response:

All of these recommendations are currently being considered and investigated under the *Service Delivery Foundations* portfolio of projects that have been created to address workload and other issues within Service Delivery. Specifically, the recommendation to create a pool of social workers is being actively investigated; the analysis regarding vacancies caused by STI has been conducted; and the department recently announced a major review and overhaul of the CYFS Policy Manual specifically designed to alleviate administrative burden, remove unnecessary administrative tasks, and reassign those that are considered necessary but do not require professional social work judgement to other non-social work staff. Analysis regarding what the true definition of a “case” is will be assigned to the *Service Delivery Foundations* project team immediately, with specific attention to the number of individual placements that may be contained within one program file and the definition adjusted to reflect this workload. Finally, direction regarding assigning a double incumbent for planned leaves will be issued in January 2022.

3. **PART – After Hours**

Recommendations:

- a. Include non-designated employees on the list
- b. Have a list with those with representative status to contact if needed.
- c. Eliminate final assignment to achieve representative status.
- d. Review Child Caring Facilities using their own staff for certain activities or have a case aide available for transport.
- e. Policy review/interpretation for a placement requiring a social worker to do transport.
- f. Increase stand by rate (negotiate with the Union).

Response:

The Department accepts these recommendations for consideration of implementation. All decisions will be made with the best interest of preserving and enhancing the relationship with the child and the child’s best interests in mind, however we agree that transportation by the placement or a case aide can be considered on a case-by-case basis. The program division will consider inclusion of non-designated employees on the after-hours duty list provided that a representative is always available should there be a need to take a child into the care of the Minister, as required by the *CFSA*. The final assignment to achieve representative status will be eliminated, and supervisors will be asked to monitor performance more actively through supervision and feedback for continuous improvement and learning purposes. Finally, the employer agrees that the standby rate should be improved to be in keeping with other departments of government and will engage the NSGEU in this negotiation.

4. Safety Culture

Recommendations:

- a. Enhance the “alerts” feature in ICM/CCM to include drop down options to better explain safety/risk issue.
- b. Review practices that result in staff working full days and after hours and reporting the following day.
- c. OHS be included as part of new hire orientation program, include in CORE training foundation, including specific training to child protection and anyone doing home visits.
- d. Ensure that all staff are current on mandatory OHS training and how to use the internal reporting system.
- e. Provide training and resources for supervisors and managers to support staff who experience trauma in the field.
- f. Review communication options (such as satellite phones) for areas where cell reception is poor or unavailable.
- g. Develop a social media program to prevent staff from being identified and support staff if targeted
- h. Conduct hazard assessments to determine necessary PPE, including appropriate training for use, and ensure that PPE is available (including after hours).
- i. Develop service level agreements with RCMP and local police on expected support for social workers in the field.

Response:

The majority of these recommendations are already in place in the department and require refreshing so that all staff are aware of the training, resources, and tools in place. Specifically:

- The drop-down menu in ICM/CCM has more than 15 options and can be accompanied by a comprehensive note in the system that provides detail of the nature and date of the alert and should be refreshed at least annually. A reminder will be issued regarding appropriate use of the Security Alert feature in ICM.
- The employer does not have the expectation that staff report to work after being out for an after-hours call. This will be reiterated with supervisors and managers.
- OHS training, including use of the internal reporting system, is mandatory for all staff, supervisors and managers, and a module regarding personal safety when in the field already exists. This will be reissued.
- Support for staff experiencing trauma in the field is available through the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) through a critical incident debriefing session which supervisors or managers can request. Consideration for specific training that can be provided by supervisors and managers will be investigated to augment or replace this should an office or individual employee prefer that route.
- The recommendations regarding communication options and social media are being explored by the joint Safety Committee which was established prior to COVID. The employer is reinstituting this committee and putting deadlines around delivery of these two items for end of March 2022.
- PPE and training regarding use of same are available through the Pulse and supplies of PPE are available in all offices.
- The employer will explore service level agreements with policing services through the Department of Justice and will work with supervisors and managers to encourage the development of stronger relationships with local policing units.

5. Retention of New Social Workers

Recommendations:

- a. Consider a targeted (financial or other) incentive to retain social workers for positions that have high turnover (such as Child Protection and rural areas).
- b. Limit permanent employees' ability to EOI to another SW 1-2 to once per fiscal year.
- c. Establish an onboarding (minimum 6 weeks) for new social workers.
- d. Develop a mentorship program for new social workers in Child Protection.
- e. Access to timely training through webinars such as role specific training and components of CORE.
- f. Financial support to BSW students entering DCS workforce; financial incentives for relocation to Nova Scotia.

Response:

The employer accepts these recommendations. The *Service Delivery Foundations* project has a priority focus on attraction and retention of social workers. The team is working with the Advanced Education department to explore options associated with incenting Nova Scotia students in receipt of Nova Scotia student loans who are studying in BSW programs across Canada to return home and accept employment with DCS. Incentives that would encourage graduates to accept employment within child protection and specifically in rural offices through Return of Service agreements are being investigated. Onboarding and mentoring programs are in place in some offices and will be replicated and implemented throughout all offices. The training team is being asked to create webinar training options where in person training is not required, and to have these available to be used on an ongoing basis.

The recommendation regarding limits around EOI has already been tabled by the employer with the NSGEU and has not been accepted by the NSGEU.

Summary

The employer appreciates these recommendations being brought forward by the Labour Management Committee. Since the original grievance was filed in 2018, we have been actively working to improve working conditions and sit in agreement with these recommendations. There are some limitations to what the employer can do related to the number of full-time equivalents (FTE) positions however we are committed to finding creative solutions that fit both those limitations and the terms of the Collective Agreement. We would propose that the co-chairs of the four LMCs reconvene on a bi-annual basis with the Deputy Minister and Executive Directors of the CYFS and Service Delivery divisions to review progress made on these recommendations, with the first meeting to take place in April 2022.

I look forward to your response and to working collaboratively on these initiatives.

Tracey Taweel
Deputy Minister
Department of Community Services