



VANCOUVER and DISTRICT LABOUR COUNCIL



March 21, 2020

VIA Email: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P., Prime Minister of Canada – justin.trudeau@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable John Horgan, M.L.A., Premier of the Province of British Columbia – premier@gov.bc.ca

Greetings,

I am writing today on behalf of the Vancouver and District Labour Council, representing approximately 60,000 unionized public and private sector workers in the Vancouver area.

I wish to express the grave concerns I have heard from many of our affiliates and delegates regarding the state of municipal finances, as well as TransLink finances, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts that this situation will have on working people, their families, and their communities.

As you know, municipal governments and regional authorities such as our local public transit authority, TransLink, are facing a precipitous decline in revenue as a result of this horrible pandemic. Unlike the federal and provincial governments, they are not permitted to run deficit budgets. This set of circumstances opens the door to those who would push for harmful and irresponsible austerity programs which would destroy jobs and reduce or eliminate critical services.

It also puts decision makers in a bind, forcing them into impossible choices about which constituencies or communities will bear the brunt of cuts. While we are urging local governments and authorities to do all that they can to avoid or minimize cuts and layoffs, we also feel a responsibility to add our voices to those calling on senior levels of government to assist with the resources to help achieve this.

Although the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) program has been established by the Federal government to assist in keeping workers on payroll, municipalities have been excluded from this program. Yet it is municipal governments who employ critical workers, many of which are in female-dominated professions including library workers, Park Board staff maintaining our parks during the pandemic, 311 operators, City Hall workers, support staff answering public inquires, first responders such as police and firefighters, as well as workers involved in operating water, sewage, waste collection, and other systems. It also includes direct service providers, including those providing critical services to vulnerable communities like Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

To: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Premier John Horgan
Re: Municipal Finances

We acknowledge that on April 16th, the provincial government announced measures authorizing local governments to borrow from existing capital reserves, without interest, to help pay for employee salaries and other operating expenses. Also announced were provisions to defer school tax remittances and some flexibility to carry debt for an additional year.

While welcome, these measures fall short of what municipalities have identified as their needs. For example, the City of Vancouver has requested a \$200 million grant to cover the provision of critical services. This has released startling projected shortfalls based upon various potential durations of the current state of emergency. Other municipalities in the region have since issued their own projections, indicating what appears to be a widespread cause for concern.

Similarly, TransLink has indicated a loss of \$75 million per month as a result of the pandemic. There is now talk of additional, widespread cuts to public transit services. This would have both an immediate and long-term negative impact on workers, communities, our economic recovery, and our climate. Not least of these concerns is the fact that many frontline workers rely upon transit services to get to and from work and provide the services we are all relying on.

Municipalities and authorities like TransLink need urgent support from senior levels of government, including inclusion in the CEWS program, and an infusion of emergency funds to cover remaining deficits. If these entities are left out of our pandemic response, the results will be catastrophic for many, and our future recovery will be severely hampered.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Yours truly,



Stephen von Sychowski
President, Vancouver and District Labour Council

cc: VDLC Executive Board
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Re: Municipal Finances

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