



VANCOUVER and DISTRICT LABOUR COUNCIL



March 6, 2023

TO: Vancouver City Mayor & Council
Via Email

Dear Mayor Sim & Councillors,

I am writing on behalf of the Vancouver & District Labour Council, representing approximately 60,000 union members across more than eighty affiliated unions, to express our dismay at the recent decision to decertify as a living wage employer.

As everyone is painfully aware, the cost of everything from rent to groceries, to fuel and consumer goods is climbing rapidly. Caught between climbing inflation, and rising interest rates, many working people and families are struggling to get by in what was already an unaffordable region for many.

The living wage provides the bare minimum required to get by in this region and keep out of poverty. Certifying as a living wage employer was a momentous decision for the City of Vancouver, and one which was taken thoughtfully and purposefully. It was a commitment to those whose work makes this city run that they would be supported to be able to live in the city they work hard in every day.

A rolling average will not meet the minimum rate established as the living wage for Metro Vancouver. This means that workers will be shortchanged at the very moment that they need this raise the most, as living expenses balloon.

Worse yet, this decision will impact those workers who are already the lowest paid, and who work in the most precarious positions. These are predominately workers who do not yet have the benefit of a union, therefore their opportunity to anticipate a wage increase relies not upon a collective agreement, but the living wage certification.

These workers are most likely to spend their hard-earned pay cheques right here in the local community, particularly if those pay cheques allow them to live here. The downstream effects of lower wages are less activity in the local economy, less revenue for small business, and greater likelihood of workers living and spending elsewhere. When this happens it also means more people commuting longer distances to and from work, causing congestion and climate impacts.

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We understand that council is looking for savings considering the substantial tax increases forthcoming in this budget. However, we cannot agree with savings found by taking from the compensation of city workers, whether union members or not. While other cities in Metro Vancouver, and across BC, have maintained their commitment to living wage, it is difficult to imagine that a municipality as large as Vancouver would be unable to do so, despite other financial priorities.

Finally, we are also disappointed that this decision was made without the opportunity for consultation with community, stakeholders, and affected workers. We received a letter from the city as a “community partner” attempting to justify the decision after the fact, but this was the first we had officially heard of the change.

If we want to build a city that is for everyone, we can’t leave city workers behind. We strongly encourage reconsideration of this decision.

Sincerely,



Stephen von Sychowski
President, VDLC

cc: VDLC Executive Board
VDLC Political Action Committee

svs/eb