

June 19, 2023

The Honorable David Eby
Premier, Province of British Columbia
P.O. Box 9041
STN Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Eby,

I am writing on behalf of the active working members of the United Steelworkers (USW) and our retired members in the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR). SOAR chapters are chartered by our Local Unions and include former miners, manufacturers, mill, and telecom workers, who have lived and settled in every corner of our province.

Our union has backed BC's SOAR chapters efforts over the last five years as they worked with seniors' and community organizations to address the financial hardship British Columbians experience paying to seek medical care at hospitals in the province. Paid parking and parking fines at medical facilities and hospitals create a barrier to universal access to our public health care system, especially for seniors on fixed income who are also being hit with other rising costs of living. We know seniors are not alone.

People should not have to scrimp and save to afford a trip to the hospital. Families taking children to the emergency room and adults waiting to see a doctor which may never even have an opening for them should not have the parking meter ringing up a toll while they wait to see if they will even receive healthcare. Furthermore, parking rates change depending on where you wait to receive care, for example being more expensive in the lower mainland versus in Vancouver Island. Patients experience different costs depending on where they live for access to the same system. The system is unfair. Additionally, fines collected by Impark send the money to a foreign owned company. How is this in the best interest of British Columbians? I sincerely urge you to consider this question if you insist on entering negotiations on the next contract.

We appreciate that with continued pressure from seniors and advocates, Health Authorities have developed financial hardship and patient support policies to help address unexpected burdens some patients and families may find from parking fees. That was a welcome move, that recognized affordability challenges that everyday British Columbians face. However, the policy is unevenly communicated by different Health Authorities, and in particular poorly communicated in Fraser Health Authority. We would ask that you encourage Health Authorities to better inform patients and advocacy organizations about this support. Further we are asking you to consider expansion of this policy where the hospital campus or health facility also includes the delivery of long-term care.

United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union

We know the demands of building a caring society depends on people. Steelworkers recognize that across Canada recruitment and retention of health care workers is a priority for provincial governments and recognize your Government's nation leading efforts in this regard. In part some of these challenges are attributable to our aging population, with more British Columbians requiring care and more retiring. At the same time, time increasing life expectancy and quality of life in our elder years is also growing the largest cohort of unpaid, peer elder care providers our province has ever had.

The pandemic, the heat dome, and ongoing challenges of mental health and addiction have highlighted the importance of family or community-based peer contact for elders. We all know it builds a healthy community and the important role that has in prevention of illness and disease, but it also builds a caring society. Allowing and encouraging free parking for visitors of long-term care patients is an investment in that. As such we are asking your government to continue to review paid parking in our public health care system, with an effort to encourage peer contact for elders, whether residing in long-term care or as a visitor to a patient.

We know the value of the active participation of elders in our society. We see it in our union where our SOAR members are with us in every effort. They share their experience in tough bargaining and are regulars on picket lines and at solidarity rallies. They mentor our next generation and join us in political action through lobbying and getting Steelworkers and SOAR members out to vote. They're not just our past, they're our future too.

As a union, we negotiate hard for retirement benefits. We ask our members every round of bargaining to think ahead and envision life after work, retirement with dignity. That's what our SOAR members have asked our Local Unions and our leadership, and in turn your government to do, by eliminating barriers and encouraging elder connections and contact in our communities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Scott Lunny
Director

SL/JU/PR/sch

CC: Hon Adrian Dix, Minister of Health
Harwinder Sandhu, MLA, Parliamentary Secretary, Senior Services & Long-Term Care
Lower Mainland NDP MLA's
Suzanne Skidmore, President BC Federation of Labour
Leslie Gaudette, President COSCO (coscobcpresident@gmail.com)
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