

February 3, 2021

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Premier's Office
Room 281
Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford

Re: Pandemic Pay

When the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic was recognized in Ontario, your government announced a \$4 per hour pay increase for many frontline workers, including personal support workers (PSWs). This additional funding for workers lasted for approximately four months, between April 24, 2020, and August 13, 2020. Your government introduced temporary pandemic pay to provide additional support and relief to frontline workers, to encourage staff to continue working, to attract prospective employees, and to help maintain safe staffing levels and the operation of critical frontline services.

In October 2020, the provincial government further announced that 147,000 eligible personal support workers (PSWs) would receive a \$3 an hour raise lasting until about March 2021. On October 1, 2020, you stated, "As we enter the second wave, we need to stabilize our PSW workforce...we need to make sure that when our loved ones need care, there is a PSW there to support them, and that means retaining our PSWs and getting more into the system." Currently, 50,000 PSWs are eligible for the pay increase in long-term care facilities, 38,000 in in-home and community care, as well as 34,000 in children, community and social services. As Premier, you went on to state that the pay increase is temporary, but you hope to make it permanent before it expires in March.

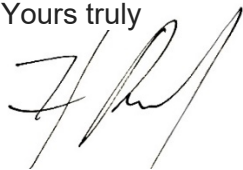
The work of a PSW has many similarities to the work of our education worker members who are currently in schools assisting and supporting some of the most vulnerable students. Educational Assistants (EAs) support students with daily personal tasks, including toileting, hygiene, dressing, and eating. Some EAs are trained specifically to catheterize students and administer medication. Toileting often occurs with the assistance of multiple staff, requiring two

to three people to occupy a small space with an unmasked student, several times per day. Many assist with mobility and exercise routines. Educational Assistants are responsible for helping students with assistive technology, including hearing aids and mobility lifts. They always work near students, many of whom are unable to wear a mask or wear one inappropriately. Physical distancing is mostly impossible.

Educational Assistants are often key members of behaviour safety teams who de-escalate and, if necessary, use non-violent crisis intervention and restraint techniques. Like PSWs, Educational Assistants are exposed to various bodily fluids, which could include saliva, vomit, urine, feces, semen and menstrual blood. Like PSWs, EAs and other education workers are putting their personal health and safety at risk daily and have been, since the inception of this global pandemic. If our members are required to work in these conditions, they too must receive the pandemic pay and it must be retroactive; any education worker working in-person with students in a similar way to how PSWs work with their clients, should receive pandemic pay during the same time period that PSWs have been eligible for the support. It is the position of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) that no worker in the province of Ontario should be expected to risk their health and safety, especially when there are measures the government could be taking to reduce the risk and prevent potential tragedies. It is not enough to send education workers into the same situation as personal support workers, telling them only to use personal protective equipment (PPE), and often using that PPE with little or no training on its appropriate use. Often education workers are working with the same students who return to their residence in the evening, and on weekends with PSW support.

If our educational assistant members are required to work in these conditions, pandemic pay should be available to them, just as it is for the PSWs who perform similar tasks in the home and other care institutions.

Yours truly



Harvey Bischof
President, OSSTF/FEESO

cc: Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health
Hon. Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance
Hon. Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development