

Legislative Update – March 2020

Provincial State of Emergency: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the province has declared an official state of emergency. This measure provides the province with the authority to access to land and human resource assets that may be necessary to prevent, respond to or alleviate the effects of the emergency. This includes securing the critical supply chains to make sure people have access to essential goods and services, and that infrastructure necessary in a response is readily available.

Provincial Health Officer Orders: The Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, has prohibited gatherings of more than 50 people and has ordered self-isolation for any traveler who has returned from outside of Canada after March 12, 2020. She has also ordered all businesses with liquor primary licenses (bars, pubs, night clubs, etc) to close and that restaurants and cafes that cannot maintain social distancing of one to two metres between patrons must move to take-out and delivery models. Finally, she has reminded employers that they must excuse workers for sickness without requiring a doctor's note.

Economy: It is likely that the economy will go into a deficit situation. The province's priorities are ensuring there are services and supports to protect health of British Columbians, bringing in immediate relief for people and businesses and building a plan for economic recovery.

Education Statutes Act: The government passed changes the School Act to allow school boards to directly offer child care services. The legislation also allows the government to protect any spaces funded specifically for child care on school property. Government will make it easier to school boards to work with licensed child care providers, share professional development and create inclusive, welcoming spaces for children to learn.

B.C. Access Grant: The new, needs-based B.C. Access Grant will provide up to \$4,000 per year to those who need it most: low- and middle-income students. Students will receive the grant at the beginning of their studies so they can pay for tuition, textbooks, lab supplies and other items needed for their program of study. More than 40,000 low- and middle-income students will be eligible for the new B.C. Access Grant, which will be available starting in the fall 2020 semester.

More Child Care Spaces: Funding has been approved for more than 17,000 new child care spaces since July 2018 under the Childcare BC plan and the Early Learning and Child Care agreement with the federal government.

K-12 Maintenance Funding: B.C. Schools will be receiving record annual maintenance funding of \$217.7 million this year. Included in this total is \$17.2 million from CleanBC's program to provide schools with resources to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

BC Auditor General for Local Government: Following a 31% budget reduction for the BC Auditor General for Local Government, Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister

Selina Robinson advised that they will be phasing it out and then shuttering this office within the next two years. The Union of B.C. Municipalities and CUPE previously had called on the provincial government to close this office.

Paid Domestic Violence Leave: Following last year's introduction of up to 10 days of unpaid, job-protected leave for domestic or sexual violence leave, government has passed legislation that will provide for up to five days of paid leave for workers impacted by domestic or sexual violence, or parents of a child or dependent impacted by this kind of violence.

Coastal Ferries Consultation: The government has extended their consultation regarding the future of our coastal ferries. They would like to collect the public's input on what should the coastal ferry service look like in 20, 30 or 40 years and how should services be delivered to better support a desirable future? You can share your feedback by [completing the online questionnaire](#).

Legislative Session: The House is scheduled to return on Monday, March 23, 2020, but it will return with just 12 members (7 NDP, 2 Liberals, 2 Greens and the Speaker) to pass the supply bill (providing funding for government ministries) and two pieces of legislation to amend the Employment Standards Act to ensure that no worker can be fired for following direction of the provincial health officer. All three parties are working collaboratively on these matters and hope to pass all the legislation in a single day.

In solidarity,

Justin

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