



Notes for a Submission

By

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To the Law Amendments Committee
On Bill No. 7

An Act to Amend the Workers' Compensation Act
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Introduction

Thank you, Madam/Mr. Chairperson and members of the Committee for the opportunity to speak to you about Bill 7 – *An Act to Amend the Workers' Compensation Act*. I am Jason MacLean president of NSGEU.

The Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU) is the largest union in the province representing approximately 31,000 workers across the public sector in the provincial government, corrections, health care, public schools, community colleges, universities, municipalities, and community organizations.

The NSGEU represents a range of workers who are emergency responders: police/peace officers, social workers, correctional workers, paramedics, sheriffs, probation officers, firefighters, Licensed Practical Nurses & Registered Nurses, home support/continuing care workers and more. These are the people you need by your side in a time of crisis and all of them can be confronted with unthinkable, and unfortunately unforgettable situations.

The very nature of their work makes these workers vulnerable to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Unfortunately, these emergency responders aren't receiving the supports they need when they develop PTSD, because of their working environment and the variety of calls, they respond to.

So first off, thank you. Thanks to Dave Wilson and the NDP Caucus for their numerous attempts at bringing this issue forward and keeping it on the front burner. Thanks to the PC caucus for their support on this issue and thank you to Minister Regan who brought this Bill forward last spring and Minister Kousalis and all members of the Liberal Government for introducing Bill 7 in this session.

You are all going to be surprised by my next comment, but I want to thank the Premier for this Bill. I know it's something that has struck a chord with him.

On November 10, 2016, just right outside on the corner of Granville and George Street. The NSGEU joined with the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers (UCCO) to raise awareness for the need for amendments to the WCB Act nationally and provincially to include automatic coverage of PTSD for first responders.

UCCO was doing a Nationwide campaign to give the public and law makers like yourself a sense of what work life is like in a Correctional Facility. They designed the inside of a truck trailer as a jail and had people playing the role of inmates. It just so happened that when I toured the vehicle the Premier was right behind me. When we finished up the Premier and I chatted and he said something along the lines of "we have to do something about this."

I said anytime. We met a few times last winter and spring to discuss the Bill and he even gave me a preview before it was introduced. So even though

he and I may disagree on some issues, it's important that we can always set those issues aside and work together on common interests for the betterment of Nova Scotia.

As it stands, the legislation intends to covers continuing-care assistants, correctional officers, emergency-response dispatchers, firefighters, nurses, paramedics, police officers and gives Cabinet the ability to cover other persons in occupations prescribed by the regulation.

I would like to see the initial list broadened to include sheriffs, social workers and probation officers all who may have to deal with horrific situations.

For instance, when Bill 7 was introduced I received an email from a Sherriff asking if they would be covered. When I said no, they were missed I asked him to send some issues I could use in my presentation.

Here is what he said: Jason, A few incidents spring to mind.....Just in our geographical area.....

- One officer has witnessed 3x hangings.....
- In cells we have had urine and feces thrown our way, as well as intimidation and threats, threats to family, our person and property.
- Dealing with people in the common areas of the courthouse;
- during trials hearing testimony regarding sexual misconduct against children, violent murder evidence...and yes, at times autopsy pictures are viewed by the court.
- On transport, we have witnessed violent accidents resulting in death; had prisoners breach the cages and try to get at us

- all this and not even mentioning when we have been physically assaulted, spit upon etc.....verbal obscenities all day long directed our way by persons in custody.
- Jason... although these things come with the territory as it were, it does affect some officers to their detriment.....anyways, thanks for your time....these thoughts were contributed by a number in our office and we appreciate your word to respect our anonymity.

So stop and think what this would do to each of you and remember that the social workers we send into broken homes and the probation officers who deal with troubled youth face the same kinds of problems.

And they all have to do their jobs shorthanded and with a lack of additional resources like mental health supports to help their clients.

Therefore, I strongly urge you to amend the initial list to include the above mentioned occupations.

In conclusion, thanks to again for finally recognizing this issue, thanks again for reintroducing this Bill and thanks in advance for passing this amended Bill and getting these Nova Scotians the help and support they need.

We appreciate this opportunity to speak with you, and we welcome your questions or comments.