

MEDIA RELEASE

UNIONS THROW THEIR SUPPORT BEHIND THE PROVINCE'S IN-HOUSE CIVIL LAWYERS, WHO JUST WANT TO NEGOTIATE THEIR OWN CONTRACT

The BCGEU, Professional Employees Union and the BC Crown Counsel Association are backing the BC Government Lawyers Association in its bid to get the green light to bargain collectively

Victoria, B.C. (January 16, 2023): Unions representing employees who work for the BC government stood together today and declared their support for the government 's 350 civil lawyers who want the right to collectively bargain their own contract.

The BC Government Lawyers Association (BCGLA) has gone to the BC Labour Relations Board after obtaining the support of approximately 75% of civil lawyers in government in a card sign-up campaign. The result is well above the 55% threshold for automatic certification as spelled out in Bill 10, which was passed by the NDP government last year in order to make it easier for workers to unionize.

But the government is arguing before the Labour Relations Board that its civil lawyers - including those who advised on and wrote Bill 10 itself - cannot take advantage of it, citing the *Public Service Labour Relations Act* passed in 1973 by the government of David Barrett, which first recognized the right of public servants to collectively bargain. The government argues that only workers who are in bargaining units set out under the 1973 law can bargain collectively. The BCGLA responds that the *Labour Relations Code* and the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantee all employees the right to bargain collectively.

The other government worker unions agree this the government's position is unfair and together are calling on it to reconsider and let the lawyers bargain for themselves.

"Any group of employees should have access to collective bargaining if they choose", said Stephanie Smith, President of the BCGEU. "That is a right for all workers."

"The BC government lawyers deserve the right to choose their union," said Shawna LaRade, President of the Professional Employees Association (PEA), which represents 1,200 BC public service professionals. "We support the BCGLA in their fight to be certified and bargain their own collective agreement."

"It is important lawyers working for government have representation and can have an independent process for resolving disagreements with the government as employer," said Kevin Marks, President of the Crown Counsel Association, which has bargained collectively with the government since 2000. "Civil lawyers in federal and most provincial governments have unions. It should be the same here."

The BCGLA is asking the LRB to rule that the outdated legislation is denial of the lawyers' right to freedom of association, as guaranteed by the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. "Unions and associations representing government workers are united in supporting the constitutional right to collective bargaining," said Gareth Morley, President of the BC Government Lawyers Association. "We appreciate the solidarity of the BCGEU, PEA and Crown Counsel Association in our fight."

About the BCGLA

The BC Government Lawyers Association advocates for 350 government civil lawyers in matters of remuneration, benefits, conditions of employment and matters of professional interest relating to employment.

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