



MEDIA RELEASE

IT'S BEEN A YEAR - AND THE DISRESPECT CONTINUES AGAINST OUR PROVINCIALY EMPLOYED LAWYERS, EVEN AFTER THE PASSAGE OF THE INFAMOUS "BILL 5"

A legal challenge remains in the works, but more roadblocks have emerged since the bill forced BCGLA members to join the Professional Employees Association, cutting off their own union bid "at the knees"

Victoria, B.C. (July 15, 2024): It was a year ago - July 14, 2023 to be exact - that Bill 5 came into force, shutting down efforts by 350 government lawyers belonging to the BC Government Lawyers Association (BCGLA) to form their own union - and forcing them into the Professional Employees Association (PEA) instead.

The government lawyers, who draft legislation, interpret the law, and represent the province in civil matters, had been in the process of being certified as a union of their own choosing, after more than 70 per cent of their members signed union membership cards in accordance with BC's union certification process. That's when the government rushed in Bill 5 a year ago to head that off, despite criticism from the labour movement, and opposition members during lengthy debate in the House.

"Our members have a long memory and that means this issue will always be seen as the heavy hand of government slapping down the rights of BC workers. Bill 5 was an end run around an active certification process that this government itself created, and forced a group of workers to join a union of the government's choosing," says Micah Weintraub, president of the BCGLA. "We launched a constitutional challenge to Bill 5 in BC Supreme Court as soon as the law was passed, but we still don't have a court date."

"Since being forced into the PEA, the government has continued to block us on other fronts. First, they tried to unilaterally impose transition terms on us, denying us key benefits of the PEA collective agreement. An arbitrator said no to that, confirming the government has a duty to negotiate transition terms, not dictate them."

"Now, the government denies we have the right to negotiate our salaries, even as new PEA union members. If we're going to be part of that union, then we should have access to benefits of the PEA agreement," adds Margo Foster, BCGLA Vice President. "That issue is the next one going to arbitration."

At the same time, the government identifies benefits, absent from the PEA agreement, which government lawyers will no longer enjoy. These include salary progression, payment of professional fees, and dedicated funding for continuing education.

"Morale is at an all-time low. We work long hours doing challenging work, ensuring government acts lawfully and fairly. We don't feel the government has acted lawfully and fairly towards us. People feel disrespected and bullied. Some of them are leaving. We're losing talent and experience. We're losing mentors, as our working conditions continue to erode." said Weintraub.

(more)

“Employers don’t get to pick unions, workers do,” Foster adds. “No other employer in the province can do what the government has done unilaterally. We consider these actions by a labour-friendly government to be hypocritical and unjust. It’s been a year already, but we’re not letting this go away.”

About the BCGLA

The BC Government Lawyers Association has represented the interests of government civil lawyers for over 30 years in matters of remuneration, benefits, conditions of employment and matters of professional interest relating to employment.

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Media contact:

Trevor Pancoust

tpancoust@pacegroup.com

778.386.0843