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## **Paramedics to work ‘only their regular shifts’**

RICHMOND— BC ambulance paramedics will only work their regularly scheduled shifts at their assigned ambulance stations and their primary operators as of 6pm today. They say “it’s time to take action to protect our health and safety.”

The move follows claims by the BC Ambulance Service that there are no staffing shortages. The paramedics point to hundreds of unfilled positions across the province that have paramedics overworked and the ambulance service critically understaffed. The paramedics have been calling on the government to fill those positions.

Today’s announcement also follows the government’s rejection of an offer to settle the protracted labour dispute that has had B.C.’s 3,500 striking paramedics working under essential services orders since April 1.

Ambulance Paramedics of BC president John Strohmaier announced the plan to a crowd of more than 500 paramedics and supporters outside the Richmond Olympic Oval in a lunchtime support rally.

CUPE national president Paul Moist told the crowd that, unlike in B.C., other jurisdictions across the country have been able to negotiate settlements with paramedics based on respect and recognition of the vital service that paramedics provide.

CUPE BC president Barry O’Neill pledged the support of CUPE’s 80,000 members in B.C. “This BC Liberal government needs to stop putting paramedics and the public at risk and settle this dispute,” said O’Neill. He added that the ambulance service has been “at an all time low” since the BC Liberal came to power in 2001.

The union’s offer for settlement put forward this week was based on a three-per-cent wage increase and 1.2 per cent labour market adjustment (equal to what the provincial government settled recently with nurses) and a one-time signing bonus as was given to every other public sector union in the province. The most important component for the paramedics was the appointment of an industrial inquiry commissioner to investigate and report on the state of the ambulance service.

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