

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Province sends paramedics to health sector

VICTORIA – The BC government has moved to break up the unified bargaining unit for the province's 3,600 ambulance paramedics. The Ministry of Labour released the announcement late Wednesday after cursory "consultations" with CUPE 873 and other health sector unions and employers.

The government decided against creating a bargaining unit specifically for paramedics. The decision will send paramedics into one or more of five health-sector bargaining units, decided by a likely lengthy and expensive hearing process before the B.C. Labour Relations Board. The bargaining units consist of Nurses, Health Services - Facilities, Health Services - Community, Health Science Professionals (paramedicals), and or Residents.

"If the BC Liberals showed the same level of respect for ambulance paramedics that the people of B.C. have, this would not happen," said CUPE BC president Barry O'Neill. "Last year, the Liberals forced an end to a legal strike by paramedics - now they are forcing an end to paramedics' autonomy."

CUPE 873 president John Strohmaier said the decision is disappointing - but comes as no surprise. "This government has consistently ignored our calls to address the critical condition of ambulance services and focused instead on bargaining structure."

"It is the public who are the biggest losers in this," said Strohmaier, adding "we still have no indications from this government that there will be any improvements for patients. This was a political decision - not an emergency health care decision."

The main issues for ambulance paramedics remain equipment shortages, ambulance wait times, staffing, and conditions for communities and paramedics in remote and rural parts of the province.

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