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March 23, 2017

Attention: All Members  
CUPE Local 873

Dear Members;

**Re: Grassroots Paramedic Initiative**

Last November 2016, the Union sent out a member update regarding the independent grassroots paramedic initiative.

While we have been asked to at stay arms length by the grassroots initiative lead, as a result of the venue the initiative is being pursued, we have been receiving a lot of member questions surrounding our bargaining structure and past bargaining experiences. We also have been fielding a number questions from the public and politicians about some of the things they have heard in the media, and from the canvassers involved with the grassroots initiative. In light of many questions and inquiries the union has been receiving surrounding the grassroots paramedic initiative, I think it's important to inform you of some of the frequently asked questions and answers.

I would first like to begin by commending all who have canvassed on behalf the initiative to secure a separate bargaining unit for the Ambulance Paramedics of BC. The process under the *Recall and Initiative Act* is a daunting task to say the least. To say this initiative has been perplexing for our union would be an understatement. As a union there is no question that we have consistently been very vocal about our support for a separate bargaining unit.

Advocating for a separate bargaining unit, is something the union has been pursuing on a number of different levels. We will continue to advocate for a stand alone separate bargaining unit, as per direction of our members at convention and the adoption of our strategic plan. The question of our advocacy for inclusion in the *Fire and Police Services Collective Bargaining Act* is not as easy to answer. While advocating to be included in the *Fire and Police Services Bargaining Act* has previously been discussed, it does not form part of our strategic plan, which has been approved and adopted by our membership at Convention. Having had an opportunity to pause and reconsider with our counsel whether or not the bargaining process in the *Fire and Police Services Collective Bargaining Act* is really in the best interests of Paramedics and Dispatchers in BC. Similar processes in other provinces have not served paramedics well - the flaw in each appears to be that the Employer/Government gets to set the terms. We intend to raise this matter with delegates at Convention 2017, so an informed debate may occur.

We are also aware of misinformation that has been arising from the paramedic initiative. The misinformation has prompted a lot of inquiries to the union from the public, the Paramedics and Dispatchers, politicians, the media and other allied unions and affiliations. Below are the questions most frequently asked, with answers provided:

**Q: Have we ever been locked out?**

A: No.

**Q: Are we an Essential Service in BC?**

A: Yes. Section 72 of the BC Labour Code designates us as such. In a previous labour dispute more than 100% of our services were deemed essential.

**Q: Does inclusion into the *Fire and Police Services Collective Bargaining Act* get BC Paramedics and Emergency Dispatchers wage parity with Police and Fire?**

A: No, the *Fire and Police Services Collective Bargaining Act* gets you a process other than a strike or lockout to break impasse at the bargaining table.

**Q: Does inclusion into the *Fire and Police Services Collective Bargaining Act* mean our membership leaves CUPE for another Union?**

A: No

**Q: What happens if Paramedics and Emergency Dispatchers reach impasse at bargaining and the *Fire and Polices Services Collective Bargaining Act* covers them?**

A: Either the Union or the Employer can apply to the Minister of Labour to have the dispute resolved by arbitration.

**Q: If we're included in the *Fire and Police Services Collective Bargaining Act* can we still be required to observe the Public Sector Bargaining Mandate set by the government?**

A: Yes, the Minister of Labour sets the Terms of Reference for arbitration. In other words, the government can still mandate our wages and benefits.

**Q: What is the interest arbitration process?**

A: If the Minister of Labour orders the dispute be resolved by arbitration the Minister has the option of specifying the type of interest arbitration.

Typically, there are two types of interest arbitration:



- 1) Each party submits their written proposals and arguments on the outstanding issues and the arbitrator crafts a decision on the basis of the party's submissions.
- 2) Final offer settlement interest arbitration - again each party submits their written/ proposals and arguments and the arbitrator must select one or the other.

**Q: Has CUPE Local 873 ever done interest arbitration in the past?**

A: Yes, three times. In 1997 CUPE Local 873-02 Emergency Dispatchers of BC were seeking wage parity with fire dispatchers. They reached impasse and launched a legal strike. The government ordered them back to work, appointed an Industrial Inquiry Commissioner and set the Terms of Reference as binding interest arbitration. The resulting settlement did not come close to what 873-02 was seeking at the bargaining table.

In 2008 our wages were subject to interest arbitration. The Union argued the interest arbitration was not restricted by the Public Sector Employer's Council (PSEC) wage mandate. The interest arbitration disagreed and ruled his settlement could not exceed the PSEC guidelines for wages.

Recently, we were engaged in interest arbitration to resolve a dispute over 1) shift patterns, 2) implementing regular part time and 3) the requirement for unit chiefs. The arbitrator issued his award in February 2017 and we were bound by his decision.

In closing, regardless of the outcome of the paramedic initiative, we want you to know that we will continue our efforts to secure a standalone bargaining unit for our Paramedics and Emergency Medical Dispatchers. I hope we can count on your support and continued participation in keeping this important matter before the decision makers.

Sincerely,



Bronwyn Barter  
Provincial President  
Ambulance Paramedics and Emergency Dispatchers of BC  
CUPE Local 873

BB/sw/MoveUp

