

On Friday March 20th, the Association took part in a national teleconference between labour organizations and the federal Office of the Commissioner for Workers, part of Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). The Association shared concerns brought forward by members and, along with other groups, posed questions and shared suggestions with the Commissioner and their team.

Concerns Raised

The Association raised concerns regarding substitute teachers who have insufficient insurable hours to qualify for regular EI benefits now or when an existing claim runs out. Those teachers also have limited or no opportunities to accumulate additional hours. The same issue arises for special EI benefits like maternity and parental benefits available to new parents. In some cases, teachers expecting a new child are uncertain whether they will have sufficient insurable hours to qualify for EI maternity or parental benefits either in the near future or by the expected due date in several months' time. For teachers holding part-time contracts, they are often disentitled to regular EI benefits due to the continuous nature of their contracts. As these teachers regularly rely on substituting to supplement their income, concerns were raised that, without access to another source of income, these teachers will experience significant financial difficulties.

Recommendations

Several recommendations were put forward, including a plea to reduce the qualifying hours required for regular and special benefits and to waive the waiting period, in light of the current reality. Further, that the maximum EI benefit level be temporarily raised from 55% to 80% or higher and that regulations be amended to address the needs of part-time teachers who may otherwise be disentitled to EI benefits. NLTA President, Dean Ingram, shared the unique concerns of substitute teachers, who often rely on EI during summer months when teaching opportunities do not exist and other employment opportunities may not be readily available. The Commissioner stated, "Education is definitely a concern we're aware of".

Emergency Support Benefit – Questions

The federal government is introducing up to \$5 billion in funding under an Emergency Support Benefit plan which will be administered through CRA. This will be available to workers who are not eligible for EI and who are facing unemployment.

Several questions were posed around the duration and amount of benefits as well as the eligibility criteria, including whether this benefit will be available when a teacher's existing EI benefits run out or if a teacher's claim for EI benefits is denied. While detailed answers were not available to specific questions at this time, the Commissioner made notes of the issues and concerns brought forward for consideration as the work continues to identify Employment Insurance priorities to be addressed in the light of the COVID-19 situation. The Commissioner

indicated that policy is still being developed and that more detailed information will be available in the coming days or weeks.

What to Expect – EI Processing

The Commissioner noted that priority is being placed on processing new claims and renewal of existing benefits, in order to get people into pay. With over 500,000 new EI applications received as of Friday, they are taking measures to redeploy previously-trained employees and train new staff to deal with the increased volume.

The website is being updated regularly and they are aiming to have more information available in the next few days. Applications for Emergency Support Benefits can be made through CRA My Account and is expected to be available the first week in April.

Records of Employment (ROEs)

The Commissioner noted that codes have been provided to employers to use when issuing ROEs. These special codes are expected to ease the process regarding additional measures related to COVID-19.

Teacher Payroll staff are working to have ROEs for teachers uploaded by no later than the week of April 6-10.

Where to Find More Information:

Teachers can find existing information on EI programs here: <http://www.nlta.nl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Infosheet-5.pdf>

New Programs or changes to existing programs or benefits, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, will continue to be updated here by the ESDC:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/notices/coronavirus.html>

Additional Efforts

The NLTA continues to advocate provincially and federally for additional measures to provide support and relief for our substitute teachers. We will continue to communicate information and updates as soon as available regarding any new measures brought in to reduce financial hardship to our members during this unprecedented situation.