

Bill 28

The Public Services Sustainability Act

May 8, 2017

Submission from:
**The Public
Service
Alliance of
Canada,
Prairie Region**

To:
**The Legislative
Assembly
of Manitoba
Standing
Committee on
Social and
Economic
Development**



Public Service Alliance of Canada
Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada

Public Service Alliance of Canada
Prairie Region
175 Hargrave Street, Suite 460,
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 3R8
Telephone: (204) 956-4625
Fax: (204) 943-0652
<http://prairies.psac.com>

The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) represents more than 180,000 workers in every province and territory in Canada, including nearly 8,000 workers in Manitoba. We take our responsibility to represent our members very seriously and strongly oppose Bill 28 in its entirety as being unfair and unconstitutional.

Over 1,000 PSAC members will be impacted by Bill 28 (*The Public Services Sustainability Act*), including those who provide quality health care to Canada's veterans at Deer Lodge Centre and academic workers at the University of Winnipeg and Brandon University. Our members are on the front lines of serving our veterans and supporting a system of quality post-secondary education.

The Manitoba Federation of Labour was contacted in December 2016 to set up a meeting to discuss the government's view of the fiscal reality. The government wanted public sector unions to be part of a Fiscal Working Group to find solutions to balance the budget. But the government restricted the number of public sector unions and there was no room at the table for all of us now impacted by this bill.

This was the only meeting the Honorable Cameron Friesen attended, so we have yet to hear from the Minister of Finance. It was very disappointing to be excluded from this invitation.

Following the initial meeting, all unions representing public sector employees were extended an invitation to be part of a Fiscal Working Group. Our understanding was that the government was looking for ways to return to balance over an eight-year period and we would be able to have open and constructive dialogue to find solutions.

Fast forward to being invited to several meetings with Mr. Gerry Irving, Secretary to the Public Sector Compensation Committee, on behalf of the government and the only conclusion is that we have yet to be consulted in any meaningful way.

In order to be able to come up with solutions, we must understand the problem or the goal that is being sought. At each meeting, we have asked for information about what the government's fiscal objectives and timelines are, but have yet to receive an answer.

We believe that a healthy and strong economy benefits all Manitobans and our members are not just employees, they are citizens. We want to work towards solutions but, at the end of the day, no solution is acceptable if it infringes on our right to fair collective bargaining.

We represent academic workers at the University of Winnipeg and Brandon University. These workers sought the benefits of a union to counter poor working conditions, low wages and no benefits. We have actively been at the bargaining table seeking fair compensation and protections and will continue to fight for the best collective agreement possible.

At the end of the day, we believe that the terms of our collective agreements should be determined at the bargaining table. Strong post-secondary education is a foundation for good paying jobs that contribute to our economy, yet Bill 28 seeks to penalize those who contribute to ensuring a strong post-secondary system.

As public sector unions, we are willing to come to the table to work out solutions that are good for workers and for government, but we have to understand the problem before we can constructively discuss solutions.

The government continues to say it's all hands on deck, but other decisions tell a different story. The creative application of an MLA salary freeze means that MLA pensions continue to accrue. This, after a 20% pay increase for the Premier and his cabinet.

Meanwhile, our members at the University of Winnipeg and Brandon University are expected to take wage freezes while still trying to pay their living expenses and tuition. Many will have to

take on other jobs or increased hours to pay for this government's elimination of the tuition freeze, restricting the limited time available to focus on their studies.

So who benefits here? Maybe those Manitobans with enough disposable income to contribute to political party coffers. Or, maybe the MLA's who don't have to negotiate benefits and can just pass legislation instead.

Public sector unions have always been open to working with government in a productive and results-oriented way. We have attended meetings and asked questions and asked for information so that we can be productive in our response, but have yet to receive any response other than "we will pass that on to government" or "we're not the decision makers."

This is not consultation. As one of the unions barred from the initial meeting with the Minister of Finance, our response is simple: Withdraw Bill 28 and respect union members constitutionally-protected right to collective bargaining.