

Community-based workers talk strike if budget too stingy [CA-SK]^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

REGINA - Saskatchewan's 600 community-based group home, day-care and crisis centre workers plan to go on strike if Wednesday's provincial budget doesn't include new funding to boost their wages.

"If the budget doesn't have enough for us, these members are pumped to go," Gail Tiefenbach, a vice-president of the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees Union (SGEU), said Monday.

"We are confident that we are high on the priority list for this government."

About 400 of 600 unionized workers employed by community-based organizations in Saskatchewan have voted in favour of strike action.

They are demanding wage parity with their counterparts employed by provincial government agencies -- a move that could cost the province \$36 million.

The workers, represented by three unions, include employees of group homes, job training and child-care centres, crisis services, women's shelters and early childhood intervention centres.

Tiefenbach said community-based organizations are chronically underfunded.

As a result, employees earn \$4 to \$10 less per hour than their counterparts employed by provincial government agencies, according to a 1998 study.

"We are worth more. A lot more," said Joanne Mountney, a Melville group home supervisor who is paid \$8.05 per hour.

Social Services Minister Glenn Hagel said he could not comment on what's in Wednesday's provincial budget. But he did say wages vary depending on when community-based organizations began.

He also noted that workers with community-based organizations received a six per cent wage increase in the last provincial budget and wages have increased 23 per cent in the last five years.

Tiefenbach called the last wage increase "barely noticeable."

Tiefenbach said she doesn't expect the province to pay the \$36 million demanded all at once.

However, workers with community-based organizations plan to go on strike unless the province offers a "substantial increase" in funding as well a plan to achieve wage parity, she said.

"Just like any other service, it gets cut off when you don't pay the bills in a timely fashion."

Tiefenbach said strike action would also benefit the estimated 2,600 non-unionized workers employed with community-based organizations.

The unionized workers are represented by the SGEU, Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Service Employees International Union.

Reprinted from The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix.

Region: Saskatchewan^[2]

Tags: funding^[3]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/02/08/community-based-workers-talk-strike-if-budget-too-stingy-ca-sk> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7858> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding>