BIABC PROVIDES INPUT TO EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT

Association supports changes prohibiting 'sick notes' but seeks relief on the financial impact of mandatory sick leave policy

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Vancouver, BC – On behalf of more than 55,000 businesses in more than 80 distinct business districts, Business Improvement Areas of BC (BIABC) has provided input on proposed legislative amendments that would prohibit employers from requiring a 'sick note' – while also making recommendations on the financial impacts of the mandatory five-day sick leave policy.

In April, the provincial government introduced the Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2025 (Bill 11) that proposes to prohibit employers from requiring a "sick note" by employees, written by a healthcare professional, for short-term absences from work.

The Ministry of Labour is now consulting with representatives for employers, employees, and healthcare professionals to help inform the development of regulations that will set out the details of the sick note restriction.

In a letter to the Ministry, BIABC President Jeremy Heighton endorsed the proposed change that would eliminate the need for a sick note for a period of five consecutive days or less. The Association agrees such a change will remove stress on a heavily burdened health care system, and that such a change be inclusive of a range of health care professionals - and apply in circumstances involving the care or health of a child in the employee's care or of another member of the employee's immediate family.

Heighton has used the opportunity to renew BIABC's call for a review of the five-day mandatory sick leave policy as it relates to the financial impact on small and medium-sized business owners.

"BIABC is advocating for a review, in consultation with the business community - on options such as a rebate, subsidy or other mechanism that reduces the financial liability for businesses without placing an administrative burden on them. An amended policy would also provide five sick days in total per individual, rather than five days for each

scenario in which an individual may have more than one employer (full time/ part time – 30+hours)," suggested Heighton.

The policy was established in response to the pandemic and applies to all employees covered by the Employment Standards Act, including part-time, temporary, and casual. The present and proposed changes have a positive economic and social benefit, but it is one of several employer-related costs that have increased in recent years - and puts the onus on a business owner to pay the employee taking sick leave along with the employee backfilling that position.

This issue is a significant concern of small and medium-sized businesses, as identified through 'cost of doing business' surveys conducted by BIABC. In a July 2023 survey of more than 500 business owners, participants were asked to rank their key concerns and wage-related issues/ five-day mandatory sick leave policy ranked number one among 32.5% of respondents, number two among 23.69%, and number three among 18.4% of those who participated.

"Two years later we know this issue remains a significant concern, deserving both your consideration and attention," concluded Heighton.

About BIABC:

The Business Improvement Areas of BC (BIABC) is the provincial champion of strong, vibrant, and successful downtowns, main streets, and commercial districts throughout our province. Members represent more than 80 business districts that employ hundreds of thousands of retail, service, and office employees within defined business districts.

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